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EDITORIAL

Simulated Elections : Guaranteed Results

Over seven years ago the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) called on the Government of Belarus to take the following steps to ensure an environment for democratic transformation: **improve the Electoral Code and its processes, create an environment free of fear, provide media access for all points of view and to restore power to the parliament and the courts.**

None of these recommended steps were taken then or in the years afterwards, despite nearly unanimous worldwide agreement that all the subsequent elections were neither free nor fair and despite the threats of serious sanctions. Quite the opposite. On the eve of the current presidential elections, the Electoral Code has been stiffened by criminalizing the criticism of the sitting President, the climate of fear has greatly intensified, access to state media — unavailable while the independent press has been practically shut down, the courts made totally subservient and the parliament has not a single opposition member.

The current presidential electoral process started in effect at the Black Sea resort of Sochi on December 15 when Lukashenka visited Russian President Putin and got his concurrence for holding early elections in Belarus. Reportedly the date was chosen in order to minimize the time for the unity democratic candidate to become well known, and also to avoid the potential embarrassment of a messy July election in Belarus while Putin will be presiding over the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg. Next day the rubber-stamp parliament of Belarus approved the date of March 19, 2006 for the election, and the electoral process proceeded according to plan.

The candidates who were able to collect more than 100, 000 supporting signatures were registered, the electoral commissions at all levels were formed with nearly total exclusion of opposition members, and less than 25 days were given for actual campaigning ahead of the start of early voting on March 14. This totally unmonitored week of early voting is notorious for the level of falsification and coercive voting. The candidates were given air time of one prerecorded hour each on state television and radio in unwieldy half-hour blocks. While their sharp criticism was cut out, Lukashenka 'graciously' declined to participate, with no apparent loss, since he monopolizes the airwaves anyway, and the names of the opposition candidates are studiously barely mentioned in the state media.

Yet despite all these impediments, the name recognition of the opposition candidates rose dramatically. The Unity candidate Alexander Milinkevich's rallies are attended by the thousands all around the country, and he repeatedly calls on the voters to come to the center of Minsk at the end of voting March 19 to demonstrate their resolve not to have the election stolen. The regime's reaction is brutally sharp. Over 300 campaign activists, including the Belarusian Popular Front leader Viachorka are arrested and immediately sentenced to jail terms which conveniently extend past the Election day. The KGB 'discovers a terrorist plot' and warns the populace to stay at home after voting, in order to avoid injuries caused by the terrorists. This plot is attributed to Partnership, an NGO group experienced in election monitoring and funded by US. This rather clumsy accusation is intended to keep people away from street demonstrations while neutralizing an effective monitoring group and accusing the United States of funding an anti-government coup in Belarus.

All this took place before the Election Day on March 19 as part of the simulated elections.

And at the end of the day, the results were indeed guaranteed

The Soviet-style turnout of 93% and the 83% vote ascribed to Lukashenka exceeded even the 75% 'elegant victory' claimed at the 2001 election. The Gallup/Baltic Surveys Group stated that due to the repressive conditions no independent polling was possible or credible. (The respected Russian Levada poll announced their preliminary results with Lukashenka at 47%, Milinkevich at 26%, with 30% of those polled refusing to say. Later, Levada said that their results were not conclusive.)

Outside monitors led by the OSCE declared that the elections were not democratic. In that they were joined by EU, the Council of Europe, many European governments, and the United States which declared the election illegitimate and supported the opposition's call for new elections (see the statement on page 3.) However such view was not unanimous; Russian President Putin sent Lukashenka his warm congratulations, later duplicated by Iran and Cuba.

Using Internet and external media, Alexander Milinkevich called on the voters to come at the end of the day to the October Square in downtown Minsk and peacefully protest the fraudulent election. Despite near blizzard conditions, according to reports from the square by RFE/RL, eventually some 30,000 mainly young people were in the square, waving flags and chanting slogans. The first tents of various shapes, sizes and colors started appearing. The square was surrounded by police and various security units that started arresting people bringing food, hot tea and warm clothing. Some people leaving the square, among them the leaders of the major parties, were also arrested. A few thousand remained through the first night, and were joined the next day by additional thousands and many more tents. Popular singers and known rock musicians contributed to the festive atmosphere despite freezing temperatures. By the third night, the diehards, in numbers varying from 500 to a few thousand, decided to stay until March 25, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Belarus, proclaimed in 1918, and ignored by the current regime. Milinkevich vowed to stay with the demonstrators.

Outside the square the situation remained tense. After all, Lukashenka had threatened to 'wring necks'. Police and internal troop vehicles coursed through the city. Wave of detentions and summary courts' verdicts continued, some foreign observers and parlamentarians were deported, and journalists were beaten up or deported. The 'terrorist plot' trumpeted by the KGB in advance of the election, turned out not to be.

Throughout the country a fragile sense of hope grew, and according to many reports, the all-pervasive fear had diminished. But it will take more to dislodge the dictator who has established a system of repression approaching that of Stalin.

In concluding, it needs to be stated that if **given an adequate amount of support from the outside,** similar to that given to Solidarity in Poland in the 80's, **the Belarusian people have it in them to achieve freedom. They are now represented by the tens of thousands of young people at demonstrations, the hundreds of thousands of activists working during the campaign, and by the millions of plain citizens who voted against the dictator.**

Their Day Is Bound to Come !

Walter Stankievich

From the Publisher

There was recently an article in *Nasha Niva* by Ales Kudrytski titled " Solidarity Archipelago" in which the author describes a number of seemingly unrelated events and actions, which nonetheless have a unifying theme: -- **Solidarity about freedom in Belarus.** (You can find it in Belarusian on the Charter'97 site, dated March 14, 2006.)

And such solidarity will definitely be needed because the vengeful dictator will not readily forgive all the protests and demonstrations against the fraudulent elections. It is up to all of us – the friends of Belarus on both sides of the Atlantic to do our utmost to gain protection for those who worked, voted and demonstrated for freedom in Belarus.

Belarusian Review will expand its distribution to more government officials, political and academic figures, as well as to media outlets in order to keep them aware and better informed about the situation in Belarus.

It is up to all of us in our communities – our little islands – to do our part. It may be an e-mail to our circle of friends informing them about an important event or a relevant news article; it may be taking part in a demonstration or a picket line; it may be contacting your elected representatives individually or as part of a delegation; it may be a letter to the editor or a contribution that will help out a jailed activist's family.

And then all our seemingly minor endeavors on our little islands will coalesce into a great effort on a worldwide 'Archipelago of Solidarity' for the cause of freedom, truth and justice in Belarus!

President Bush's Message

I send greetings to those working to return freedom to Belarus and observing the 88th anniversary of the first effort to establish an independent Belarus.

Freedom is the birthright of every human soul and the permanent hope of all mankind. The desire for justice, freedom, human rights, and accountable, representative government is universal. Nations grow by allowing the talents and liberties of their people to flourish, not by suppressing freedom. By upholding the rule of law, limiting the power of the state, holding free and fair elections, and respecting the rights of all people, governments can foster more hopeful societies and empower their citizens.

I appreciate those who labor in the shadows to return freedom to Belarus, and our Nation's thoughts are with those who have been harassed, detained, imprisoned, or beaten for their efforts. The United States condemns the actions by Belarusian security services on the morning of March 24, and we urge all members of the international community to join us in condemning any and all abuses and demanding that Belarusian authorities respect the rights of their own citizens to express themselves peacefully. The United States will continue to stand with the people of Belarus and all those who are working to help Belarus take its rightful place in the community of democracies.

STATEMENT BY SEAN MCCORMACK, STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN

Fraudulent Presidential Election in Belarus

The United States cannot accept as legitimate the election results announced yesterday by the Belarusian Central Election Commission declaring Aleksandr Lukashenka the winner in a landslide. As the OSCE preliminary report documents, the election "failed to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections," and was characterized by "a disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly, association, and expression" as well by a "climate of intimidation and insecurity" and "highly problematic" vote count.

The United States congratulates the courageous Belarusian democrats who, against appalling electoral conditions and at great risk, have moved their country closer toward reclaiming its democratic rights. We support their call for a new election. We will stand with the people of Belarus and back their aspirations to take their rightful place among the world's democracies.

The United States is preparing to take serious, appropriate measures against those officials responsible for election fraud and other human rights abuses, and we will be coordinating these steps with the European Union. We call on the regime in Belarus to release immediately those detained during the campaign. The international community will continue to scrutinize the actions of the Belarusian authorities, and we caution them not to harm, threaten or detain those exercising their political rights in the coming days and beyond.

A Soviet-style Election Ends in Belarus, Protests Begin

By David Marples

Belarus has just completed a divisive and fundamentally flawed election campaign. Though the 2006 presidential election has been notable for the public prominence of two opposition candidates, Alexander Milinkevich and Alexander Kazulin, it has ended predictably with the chair of the Electoral Commission announcing yet another sweeping victory for the incumbent, Alexander Lukashenka. On the other hand, the official results have failed manifestly to convince the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Belarus's western neighbors, and the United States that the process was free and fair. Moreover, the Belarusian elite, especially in Minsk, has become politicized and is no longer swayed by the fear factor as in the past.

The official results are as follows. Lukashenka received 5.46 million votes, or 82.6% of the total; Milinkevich almost 400,000 or 6.0%; Syarhey Haidukevich, leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party, 250,000, or 3.5%; and Kazulin, 154,000, or 2.3%. The official turnout was 92.6%. The chair of the CEC, Lidziya Yarmoshyna, even saw fit to editorialize, commenting that Kazulin's low vote was a result of his rowdy campaign, a reflection perhaps of the arbitrary nature of the final tally.

Though accurate polling was almost impossible during the campaign, due to the oppressive conditions imposed by the government, available surveys suggest that Lukashenka's standing was somewhere between 50% and 60%. However, some 30% of the electorate voted at advance polls, meaning that often there were few people actually at polling stations on March 19. Lukashenka's results may have been raised upward by some 22-25%. In turn the combined total of 11.8% for the three other candidates appears very low.

... not a single source of impartial reporting remained in the country on Election day.

By election day, the few remaining media and Internet outlets for the two opposition candidates had been curtailed. *Narodnaya volya* ceased printing after its distribution centers had been persuaded to stop production. Websites, such as those of Charter-97 and Zubr, shut down. The news agency BelaPAN was also affected. Thus not a single source of impartial reporting remained in the country on March 19.

The Lukashenka regime kept up a barrage of propaganda against the opposition candidates, while arresting hundreds of their campaign team, including every major official in both camps other than the candidates themselves. Lukashenka responded to an opposition call for a public demonstration on Monday, March 20, in October Square by declaring that he would wring the necks of his opponents as he would a chicken. Throughout the campaign he deployed the KGB and the Special Forces to intimidate his opponents.

Whereas the two opposition candidates each had two radio and TV addresses of less than 30 minutes, the president, who had opted not to campaign, appeared constantly on TV and also made two lengthy addresses: the first at the so-called All-Belarusian Congress, which was attended by carefully screened delegates, and a second on Belarusian Television on March 18. His themes were repetitive: current economic stability contrasted with potential chaos under candidates who represented foreign interests, specifically of countries hostile to Belarus.

Western agencies have universally condemned the campaign. A press release from the OSCE, which had over 500 international observers from 38 countries representing its two agencies, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly, stated that the election failed to meet OSCE commitments. According to Ambassador Geert-Hinrich Ahrens, head of the long-term observation mission, "A positive assessment of this election was impossible." The EU is debating further sanctions on Belarus.

As for the opposition, it performed creditably within the highly restricted environment. Over 15,000 people came into the streets on the evening of March 19 in the largest public demonstration since Soviet times. The actual figure may have been considerably higher. The protests continued on the evening of the 20th. The essential factor from the perspective of the united opposition is the maintenance of unity in the post-election period. Such a goal may induce Kazulin to form a new alliance with Milinkevich. The two were working in virtual unison by the end of the campaign; and now face a vindictive government anxious to punish the opposition candidates.

It is a truism that Belarus is different; that national consciousness (including the use of the native language) lags well behind that of its neighbors, and that the outlook of its president is not alien to large sectors of the population. Milinkevich's appeal has been to the intelligentsia, the urban elite, and above all to young activists who do not see a future for their country within a post-Soviet and authoritarian regime, ostensibly under the permanent presidency of a quasi-dictator with little to offer other than platitudes about stability, close partnership with Russia, and a system of internal terror.

The quest for the hearts and minds of the people -- a frequently used phrase of Milinkevich -- has just begun. But it cannot be measured adequately from the perspective of an election so closely controlled by the government, with a leader who indulged in and used the threat of violence and oppression to get his way. This was a disgraceful election in many aspects, but one that revealed starkly and accurately the true nature of the Lukashenka regime. The reported results are meaningless.

Sources: *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, March 18 and 20; BBC Monitoring, March 19; OSCE Press Release, March 20; Charter-97, March 19.

FEATURES

BNR President's Appeal

The President of the Rada of Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile (BNR), Ivonka Survilla, urged Belarusian citizens to abandon their fear and to demand their rights.

In conclusion of her appeal distributed on March 12 in advance of the Presidential elections, she stated:

Dear countrymen !

You have the right, like all peoples, to live peacefully and happily in your own state, without fear or terror. You have the right to work for yourself, for your children and grandchildren. The neighboring countries are already on the path to a normal way of life. They all are ready to help you. Only one neighbor ... supports the dictator.

I will repeat the words of Pope John Paul II —HAVE NO FEAR !

Do not let anybody steal your vote. Do not lose heart. Show the world your human dignity, let the day of March 25th become forever the all-Belarusian Day of Freedom.

Why Alexander Lukashenka Will Lose in Belarus

By Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa

Presidential elections in Belarus cannot be considered free. Just the way it was in countries of Central and Eastern Europe before the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the Belarusians have no real opportunity to decide freely. The authoritative regime of president Lukashenka completely dominates the public life, the entire economy and media; being the primary employer, the state makes it explicitly clear who should be elected. The opposite case may result in loss of employment or dismissal from school. Repeated protests lead to imprisonment.

The situation does not much differ from that in Poland or Czechoslovakia in the seventies and eighties of the past century. Just like then the conditions in Belarus may appear insoluble and hopeless. However, despite the increasing penalties for every open manifestation of free will, Belarusians display growing yearning for a civil life and future in a free democratic country, in a lawful state respecting human rights. Only this explains the fact that, in spite of their differences in opinion and ideology, the conservatives, socialists, liberals, oppositional communists and dozens of persecuted and banned non-governmental organizations managed to unite in an influential democratic opposition.

As an extraordinary success may be considered the trust in the democratic opposition's presidential candidate Alexander Milinkievich, who is not only a respected personality capable of guiding Belarusians to democratic elections, but also a politician of European stature. He undoubtedly deserves international support, and should be perceived and received as a democratic representative of Belarus.

The free world should not overhear the requests of Belarusian democratic initiatives, dealing either with help to victims of political repressions, support of free dissemination of information, or with waiving fees for entry visas, and setting up scholarships distributed independently of Belarusian authorities. All this could significantly contribute to the development of a civil society in Belarus.

Lukashenka's authoritative regime cannot endlessly resist the increasing civil self-confidence. As long as the European Union will be able to effectively support it, the last nondemocratic regime on its boundary will collapse just as quickly as did once the communist regimes. And the stronger will be the pro-democratic opposition, the less painful and costly will be Belarus' transition to democracy and the subsequent transformation of its society.

The authors of this article are respective ex-presidents of the Czech Republic and Poland.

Source: *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (Prague), March 17, 2006.

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices -- 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
United States Department of State
March 8, 2006

Under its constitution, **Belarus** is a republic with a directly elected president and a bicameral National Assembly (parliament). The country had a population of just under 10 million. President Aleksandr Lukashenko, first elected in 1994, **systematically undermined the country's democratic institutions and concentrated power in the executive branch through flawed referenda, manipulated elections, and undemocratic laws and regulations.** Parliamentary elections and a referendum that removed term limits on the presidency in October 2004 failed to meet international standards. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces; members of the security forces committed numerous human rights abuses.

The government's human rights record remained very poor and worsened in some areas with the government continuing to commit numerous serious abuses. The following human rights problems were reported:

- denial of citizens' right to change their govern ment through a transparent democratic process
- government failure to account for the disappear ance of opposition political figures and a journal ist and denial of official involvement in those dis appearances
- abuse and occasional torture of prisoners and de tainees
- prison overcrowding

- arbitrary arrest and detention of citizens for politi cal reasons
- lack of judicial independence
- imprisonment of citizens for criticizing officials or participating in public demonstrations
- government seizure of leaflets, newspapers, and bulletins from members of civil society
- government closure of several independent news papers and interference in the operation of others
- massive government fines on independent papers, usually for alleged slander
- security service interference in citizens' right to assemble peacefully and use of force to disperse peaceful protesters
- deregistration and harassment of nongovernmen tal organizations (NGOs)
- deregistration of churches
- government restriction of citizens' ability to travel abroad freely
- government suppression of opposition political groups through judicial and extrajudicial measures
- domestic violence against women and children
- trafficking of women and girls
- official and societal discrimination against the Romani community
- government interference in the internal affairs of ethnic minority organizations
- official and societal discrimination against homo sexuals
- government harassment of independent unions and their members

SPORTS

- February 11, 2006
  Tennis: Belarus defeats Spain 4:1 in Davis Cup quarterfinals.
- February 20, 2006
  Tennis: 16-year old Viktoria Azarenka of Belarus defeats higher ranked (also 16-year old) Nikol Vaidisova (Czech Republic) 7:6, 2:6, 6:4.
  In 2005 Viktoria won junior Open championships of Australia and USA.
- Torino **Winter Olympics**, February 2006
  Freestyle skiing: Zmicier Dashchynski — SILVER, Alaksiej Hryshyn — 4th place.
- World **Indoor Track and Field** , March 2006
  Women's Shotput: Nadzieja Kharanenka, GOLD
  Men's Shotput: Uladzimer Mikhnevich, SILVER



Viktoria Azarenka

Helsinki Commission Probes Belarus' Elections

Warns Belarusian leader Lukashenka to Refrain from Post-Election Violence Against Peaceful Demonstrations

(Washington) - The deeply disturbing pre-election environment in Belarus, efforts to foster democracy and civil society, and U.S. policy options toward the regime of Aleksandr Lukashenka were examined at a hearing held today by the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Presidential elections are scheduled to be held on March 19.

"The pre-election climate in Belarus has been abysmal, with daily reports of arrests, beatings, and closures of NGOs and independent newspapers. It is high time to put an end to the climate of fear which has permeated Belarusian society under Aleksandr Lukashenka," said Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission. "The international community, including Russia, should collectively put Lukashenka on notice that continuing pre-election violations and in particular post-election violence against peaceful demonstrations will be unacceptable."

In a specific message to Belarusians, Chairman Brownback said: "I have a specific message to those who seek liberty in Belarus, especially the courageous youth: Know that in fighting for your freedom and dignity, which has long been denied you, you are engaged in a noble cause. **Truth is on your side and you will ultimately prevail."**

"Given the disturbing pre-election environment, where candidates and their assistants have been beaten and imprisoned, where meaningful access to the media by opposition candidates is denied, where independent voices are stifled, and where the regime maintains pervasive control over the election process, it is very hard to imagine that next week's election will be free. **We already know that the election climate is not fair," added Commission Co-Chairman Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ), sponsor of the Belarus Democracy Act which was signed in law in 2004.**

Testifying before the Commission were:
David Kramer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia;
Iryna Vidanava, Editor of Students' Thought;
Stephen Nix, International Republican Institute (IRI);
Patrick Merloe; National Democratic Institute (NDI);
Rodger Potocki, National Endowment for Democracy (NED);
Celeste Wallander, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

A transcript of the hearings is available on the Commission's website: www.csce.gov.

Some excerpts from the testimonies follow:

David Kramer: President Lukashenka is running again, having engineered a fraudulent referendum in 2004 to change a constitutional provision that would have limited

him to two terms. Clearly rattled by the recent democratic breakthroughs in the region, he and hia government have ratcheted up pressure on the opposition, non-governmental organizations, and the independent media. They have re-written the laws to criminalize "discrediting Belarus."... **Because of the government's tight control over mass media in Belarus, few Belarusians are probably aware of reports linking Lukashenka and his inner circle to corruption. ...** Distinctions between personal and state property are blurred, and a large Presidential Reserve Fund remains separate from and unaccountable to the main state budget. ...

The U.S. Government in close coordination with the European Union and with the invaluable help of the Belarus Democracy Act, has been a strong voice against the regime's abuses.

Iryna Vidanava: Young people, especially those in cities and towns, remain the most open-minded, tolerant, and pro-European segment of the population. They have no connection with the country's Soviet past and look to the future, unlike older generations with their communist nostalgia ...

These young people, the future leaders of Belarus, need our and your assistance. **I would like to offer three recommendations:**

- More assistance should be provided to alternative forms of media... such as **Internet... and crossborder radio** with a strong focus on youth.
- We must keep the world open... through **study abroad and exchange programs**... so they can tell others about (the free) life in the West.
- We must assist students and young people **who will lose their jobs, be expelled** (from university)... for their pro-democratic activities. **Legal and humanitarian support is a sign of solidarity.**

Stephen Nix: The future of democracy in Belarus is of strategic importance; not only to its people, but to the success of the longevity of democracy in all the former Soviet republics. As we have witnessed in Georgia and Ukraine, it is inevitable that the time will come... **how many more people must be imprisoned or fined, or crushed before this time comes in Belarus?** We owe the (United Democratic Forces) coalition our continued support. It is imperative that the United States and the European Union pay close attention to both the conduct and the results of the March 19 election.

Patrick Merloe: Belarusian authorities falsely accused Partnership (an election monitoring NGO) of organizing fraudulent exit polls to be released after the election in order to draw the protesters to the street where explosions would be detonated to create "blood and sacrifices" to mobilize the population and attempt to seize governmental power. This false, outlandish accusation also fallaciously tied NDI to the KGB's fiction ... **NDI Chairman Madeleine Albright... called on the government of Belarus to immediately release those detained (members of Partnership.)**

Rodger Potocki: Today I will talk about the situation and the role of NGO's on the eve of election... They include individuals like the **teacher educating people in their native language, the social worker helping Chernobyl children, and the editor whose magazine inspires young people...** The third sector (NGO's) has borne the brunt of the regime's repression ... Alexander Milinkevich, the candidate of the united democratic opposition is himself from the third sector ... The hard times of Belarus' NGOs are likely to get much harder (after a fraudulent election.)... **Belarusian activists have made a number of recommendations:**

- A key means of support (for the civil society) would be the **re-authorization of the Belarus Democracy Act.**
- The **"10 Plus Coalition"** (of parties and NGO's) should be sustained and strengthened.
- In the event of a crackdown, support must be directed at helping NGO's to survive+and make **resources available for legal and humanitarian assistance** for those who will be imprisoned, hospitalized, expelled or unemployed after the election.

The shortened oral testimony by **Celeste Wallander** of CSIS is given in its entirety:

"Belarus: A crucial step for a Transformational U.S. Foreign Policy Strategy"

In my written testimony, I address how support for democratization in Belarus fits U.S. security policy, the challenges of working with Europe for effective change in the post-Soviet region, the nature of Belarusian self-isolationist foreign policy, and the role of Russia in Belarus. For this hearing today, **I would like to focus on the need to act very decisively** if, as many expect, the elections on March 19 do not meet clear and widely accepted international standards for free and fair elections.

Although in the short term, American security policy must address immediate threats such as the spread of advanced military capabilities, regional powers that threaten American allies, and radical movements that strike at American interests at home and abroad, there is no question that investment in liberal democracy and market-based economic development in a globalized world serves long term American interests in security and prosperity. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted in January 2006, the greatest threats to security emerge from within states, and the "fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power."

As long as Belarus remains the "last dictatorship in Europe", Secretary Rice's call for a transformational diplomacy in support of American national security must apply as much to Europe as to the Middle East and Asia. Indeed, an American global transformational strategy has little credibility as long as the United States fails to directly confront the problem of a regime in Belarus that continues to repress Belarusian society and periodically stage show elections. If the United States is serious about democratic transformation as the centerpiece of its security strategy, the United States needs to get serious about democratic transformation in Belarus.

Because Belarus is a European country, such a US policy can be successful only if it is transatlantic, as the effective unity of the United States and European Union in refusing

to accept the fraudulent result of Ukraine's elections in 2004 demonstrates. **The United States and EU must face that their previous policies on Belarus have been inadequate,** and be willing to abandon tacit acceptance of the course that regime has taken.

The U.S. and Europe have consistently called for free and fair elections in Belarus, and have sharply criticized the regime when it repeatedly violates those standards. Yet official U.S. and EU policy nonetheless recognizes the regime as the legal government of the Republic of Belarus.

The 2006 Presidential Election

The United States and Europe should expand their support for long term democracy promotion in Belarus and other non-democratic countries. Efforts to support civil society and break the information blockade within Belarus are vital long term policies that will enable Belarusian citizens someday to hold the regime accountable, and chose the leadership that they believe will pursue the country's true aspirations. But we have to be hard-headed about the limited prospects for change in the short term. Because of the self-isolation of Belarus under the Lukashenka regime, because of Russian subsidization of Belarus' Soviet-style economy and social welfare system, because the regime has been brutally efficient in eliminating sources of independent political discussion over that past 12 years, it is very likely that we will witness a fraudulent election on March 19th.

The question is what the transatlantic community can do in the short term in order to create the conditions for success of the long term strategy, and how not to let short term expediency undermine a wise long-term strategy.

In the short term, the U.S. and EU should cease providing legitimacy to the show elections conducted by the regime in Belarus by recognizing their results. The purpose of elections is competition and choice: without competing political parties, free and diverse sources of information, and the presumption that citizens have the right to voice questions and their preferences, there are no true elections.

Recommendations

In the context of Secretary Rice's call for democratic transformation as integral to U.S. foreign policy, **it is time to make elections meaningful, and to end the practice of complicity in recognizing blatantly fraudulent elections.**

- If after March 19th it is clear that the presidential election in Belarus does not meet well-established standards for free and fair elections, the **United States and the European Union must publicly declare that they do not recognize the results** as the expression of Belarusian citizens, and that therefore they do not recognize the winner of such fraudulent elections as the legitimate head of state of the Republic of Belarus.
- They should call upon the government to **hold free and fair elections before the end of the year,** and declare that they will take targeted measures against officials responsible for conducting the show elections.
- As long as an illegitimate regime continues to isolate the country's citizens and deny them their basic political and human rights, the **U.S. and EU should impose individual sanctions against those officials,** such as denial of visas and seizure of assets, responsible for denying Belarusian citizens their rights.
- The transatlantic community should also launch an **international investigation into the unexplained disappearances** of Belarusian politicians, businessmen, and journalists who had challenged the Lukashenka regime.
- If the regime uses force against peaceful demonstrators protesting fraudulent elections, the international community should be prepared to lay the groundwork for an **international tribunal that would someday hold guilty officials accountable** for any orders to harm citizens exercising their rights under European and international law.
- The United States, in cooperation with Europe, should **suspend negotiations on Belarusian membership in the World Trade Organization**, until a legitimate government is elected.
- The United States, in an effective partnership with Europe, should implement **targeted trade sanctions** to deny the regime access to the resources it needs to fuel its unreformed Soviet-style political-economic system.

If transformational diplomacy fails in Europe, where transatlantic relations have a long and successful record of cooperation, and where shared values and interests are strong, it has little chance for success on a global scale. **If 15 years after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the U.S. and EU tacitly recognize a regime which retains its grip on power by using methods to eliminate political opposition and control society that the Soviet regime relied upon, it seems premature to offer to support democracy in regions where societies are less modern than in Belarus.** If the U.S. and EU do not take a stand against the trivialization of elections in Europe, the hope for democratic transformation is a slogan, not a strategy for peace and security. It is time for the term "free and fair elections" to carry the weight they deserve, and Belarus is a primary test.

QUOTES of QUARTER

Russia and its military should be prepared to thwart a "political or military-political conflict or process that has the potential to pose a direct threat to Russia's security or to change the geopolitical reality in the region of Russia's strategic interest."

Russia's Defense Minister and Vice-Premier **SERGEI IVANOV** in a Wall Street Journal article on January 11, 2006.

`We know where they met, whom they met with, and what discussions they had. God forbid they should try to perpetrate something in the country. We will twist off their heads as though they were ducklings."

President **ALEKSANDR LUKASHENKA** before the elections, referring to opposition activists.

BELARUS' FORUM

WE NEED YOUR SOLIDARITY!

We, the relatives of Belarusian political and public activists who have disappeared, call on representatives of international mass media and human rights groups.

Our family members, former Interior Minister Yury Zakharanka, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Viktar Hanchar, entrepreneur Anatol Krasouski and journalist Dzmitry Zavadski, were kidnapped and murdered. None of these crimes have been solved.

The Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Legal Affairs and Human Rights suspects the following of involvement in crimes against humanity, including organization and execution of forced kidnappings and murder: the head of Presidential AdministrationViktar Sheiman, former Interior Minister Yury Sivakou, current Interior Minister Vladimir Naumau, and the commander of Special Response Group Dzmitry Paulichenka.

The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Christos Pourgurides called upon all those who have information on kidnappings, to contact the Council of Europe.

We hereby request your help in disseminating this information regarding the disappearances in Belarus and hope that your solidarity will lead to an objective investigation of the kidnappings of our family members and the return of justice and the rule of law to Belarus.

Signed by family members of the victims.

For additional information contact: www.ciwr.org, e-mail: info@ciwr.org

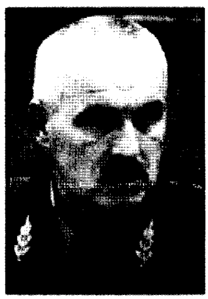
SUSPECTED
OF THE CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY



Victor Sheiman



Yuriy Sivakov



Vladimir Naumov



Dmitriy Pavlichenko

Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe suspects of the crimes against humanity, including organization and execution of enforced disappearances and murders the following persons: **Victor Sheiman**, Head of Alexander Lukashenko's Election Headquarters, **Yuriy Sivakov**, former Minister of the Interior, **Dmitriy Pavlichenko**, a brigade commander of the Belarusian **Interior** Ministry troops, **Vladimir Naumov**, Minister of the Interior. Also they are suspected of resistance to implementation of justice.

The above-mentioned persons are suspected of the involvement in enforced disappearances and murders of the well-known political and public leaders of Belarus: Yuri Zakharenko, former Minister of the Interior (disappeared on 7 May 1999), Victor Gonchar, former Vice-Speaker of the Parliament of Belarus and Anatoly Krasovski, businessman (disappeared on 16 September 1999), and Dmitri Zavadski, cameraman for the Russian TV channel ORT (disappeared on 7 July 2000). (PACE Resolution 1371 of 28.04.2004)

Mr Christos Pourgourides,
Chairman of PACE Sub-Committee On Human Rights appeals to all, who has information on the above-mentioned enforced disappearances send it to the following address:

Mr Christos POURGOURIDES
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Odd Man Out

By Andrei Sannikau, Charter '97 international coordinator

After yesterday's TV speeches of candidates for presidency, Alyaksandr Milinkevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin, it has become obvious that the pre-election campaign has started seriously. No matter how Lukashenka is trying to ignore the two real candidates, he is already taking part in the debate and losing it totally. Both Milinkevich and Kazulin have raised the most serious questions, concerning every citizen of Belarus. They have not just raised them, but also proposed practical ways of their solving. Milinkevich was sincere, thoroughgoing and composed. Kazulin focused on hushed-up problems - rather forcefully dispelled the myth of "flourishing" country, talking about the level of salaries, pensions and fees to be paid by the state with an open and controlled budget. These are not even pre-election promises, but a realistic calculation in line with the potential of Belarus.

Milinkevich is a transparent candidate, who has passed through a democratic selection before our eyes. His platform is a result of collective work of professionals. It is still unknown, who or what is standing behind Kazulin. We'd most like to believe that he is an independent figure, or at least he wants to become one. But the combination of a calm, thoughtful and a bit too quiet Milinkevich and harsh Kazulin has changed the pre-election game.

So what's Lukashenka's answer to criticism and invitation for a discussion? He answers with the wild step-up of his special services, rather reminding of armed gangs that are ready to seize anybody, and then invent accusations. With barbaric pictures "For Belarus!" (that should read as "For me, the dictator") that transfigured towns and public transport. With shameful concerts under the same name with bubblegum music and low-class "stars". With blocking Russian TV channels for new portions of mud-flinging against opposition and the West. And this all is done with our money.

After the two TV speeches the society has started to discuss earnestly advantages and disadvantages of Milinkevich and Kazulin, estimating who would be better as president. Meanwhile Lukashenka is regarded as an annoying hindrance to changes, who is preoccupied by his and our fears and complexes, not by the country. The things he could propose, are well-known: intensification of self-isolation, enslaving contracts, suffocation of business, humiliation of public servants. No joy.

And the candidates are holding out hope for real changes for the best. All told – we want a new one!

Source: Charter '97 Press Center, February 23, 2006

Thousands of Belarusians Sang Songs of Freedom

Ten thousand young Belarusians have taken part in the concert "For Freedom!" in the center of Minsk. Well-known rock-groups N.R.M., Neuro Dubel, Krama, IQ48, "Partisan School, Kasya Kamotskaya, Zmitser Vajtsushkevich and others performed on Bangalore Square. A large streamer "For Freedom!" was placed over the stage. There was an incredible atmosphere on the square, an atmosphere of freedom and changes.

National white-red-white flags, blue flags with an icon of Our Lady of Minsk and of the European Union were waving over the square. Young Belarusians have come to the concert in jeans, with denim ribbons and blue bandanas. The Unity democratic candidate for presidency Alyaksandr Milinkevich addressed the audience at the concert. He had jeans on.



"You are our future," Alyaksandr Milinkevich declared. "Freedom, Truth, Justice are for you. I know that all of you love freedom. But today in our country it's not enough to love freedom. Today we have to fight for freedom!"

The speech was greeted by applause. Young people were chanting: "Milinkevich!", "Long live Belarus!", "Freedom!"

The N.R.M. band sang their well known hits and even improvised. Singing the song: "Do not expect!", they substituted the words: "there won't be surprises" to "we're tired of the waiting".

Zmitser Vajtsushkevich sang the song "I was born here". As Belarusian first printer was mentioned in the song, he greeted the residents of St. Petersburg. Lukashenka had earlier claimed that Frantsishak Skaryna lived and worked in St. Petersburg (though this city was founded 150 years after Skaryna's death).

A soloist of the band "Neuro Dubel" Alyaksandr Kulinkovich stated: "We hope that you shall make the right choice and then we'll have a chance to organize many concerts". He added: "I will certainly come to the October Square."

Many international journalists present at the concert noted that "the atmosphere reminded them of Kyiv during the Orange Revolution: jeans, flags of the European Union, blue balloons, and people singing songs of freedom together!"

Source: Charter'97 Press Center, March 18, 2006.

Lukashenka Claims Vote Count, But Milinkevich Gets The Crowds

MINSK, March 19, 2006 (RFE/RL) -- Election day in central Minsk ended with the sound of many thousands of Belarusians chanting "Long live Belarus!" But the name the crowds were chanting was that of Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the main opposition candidate, and not that of the man who, preliminary results indicate, won nearly 89 percent of the vote.

How many Belarusians turned up is a matter of guesswork, but as many as 30,000 opposition supporters gathered to protest a vote that will already seems certain to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to office for an unprecedented third term.

Alexander Lukashuk, the director of RFE/RL's Belarus Service, said there were "an incredible number of people, an incredible number of young people" carrying flags of the European, the opposition Zubr movement and -- above all – the white-red-white flag that was, until 1996, Belarus's national flag.

There were no reports of clashes between protesters and security forces, although large personnel trucks delivered troops to the area. Metro and bus service to the region had also been interrupted.Thousands turned out in the square to show their displeasure with the official vote count (epa)

Lukashenka had vowed earlier in the day that protesters seeking to disrupt the vote would have their necks broken like "ducklings."



But such threats were not enough to keep away the protesters. "This is my homeland. If I am become afraid to live in my homeland, this is the worst thing that can happen to a human being," one woman told RFE/RL.

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the main democratic candidate in the vote, appeared at October Square, as did his fellow opposition figure Alyaksandr Kazulin.

Milinkevich ended the rally with a call for opposition supporters to return to the square for another rally on March 20.

Early results from the election show Lukashenka with an overwhelming lead.

The Belarusian Central Election Commission (CEC) said with 22 percent of the ballots counted, Lukashenka had won 88.5 percent of the vote.

An official win would mean Lukashenka, who has already ruled Belarus for 12 years, would remain in office until 2011.

Earlier, CEC head Lidziya Yarmoshyna said early figures from "closed" polling stations, such as hospitals and military bases, showed the incumbent with an "even more overwhelming" victory, with 98.4 percent.

Milinkevich described the official results as "ridiculous."

Editor's Note: The CEC announced already the next day that, according to preliminary results, President Lukashenka was reelected for a third consecutive term with 82.6 percent of the vote.

According to the CEC statement Lukashenka's election rivals, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Syarhey Haydukevich and Alyaksandr Kazulin got 6 percent, 3.5 percent and 2.3 percent of the vote.

Election turnout was Soviet style — 92.6 percent.

Minsk March Ends In Violence, Arrests

By Jean-Christophe Peuch

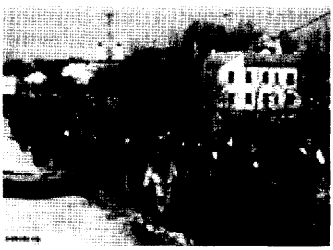
In the Belarusian capital Minsk on March 25, police assaulted opposition supporters as they were marching toward the city's main detention center to demand the release of people held over the past few days. Opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin was detained. The incidents occurred soon after a larger opposition rally ended peacefully in a central city square. The clashes took place near Minsk's musical comedy theater as thusands of opposition supporters were heading toward the Akrestsina detention center.

Riot police blocked the road leading to Akrestsina, and beat their shields with truncheons while they advanced on the crowd.

An RFE/RL Belarus Service correspondent reports he heard several explosions of undetermined origin as police was charging. He says he saw people lying on the ground. Television footage broadcast on Georgia's Imedi TV shows men carrying a form lying on a stretcher. A man told RFE/RL's Belarus Service that police were using indiscriminate violence. "They're kicking women," one witness said. "This is outrageous. They're real fascists!" In remarks carried by the official Belta news agency, Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau said demonstrators attacked police forces first, "throwing bottles and other objects." He also denied responsibility for the explosions, saying they wounded one civilian and eight security officers. Opposition leader Alyaksandr Kazulin, who was leading the march, was detained.

Navumau accused Kazulin of calling upon demonstrators to seize state buildings and overthrow Belarus's government. In comments made to RFE/RL's Belarus Service, the wife of another opposition leader, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, denied reports that her husband, too, was detained. Milinkevich's spokesman Pavel Mazhejka was briefly detained. Earlier, both Milinkevich and Kazulin were addressing a crowd of several thousand on Yanka Kupala Square to demand that the outcome of the March 19 presidential polls be annulled.

Election officials say incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka won a landslide win with nearly 83 percent of the votes. Milinkevich came second with 6 percent and Kazulin came last with 2.2 percent. The opposition, however, says the vote was rigged. Milinkevich told supporters on March 25 that a new vote should be held "without Lukashenka."



March to Akrestsina

He vowed that the Belarusian president-elect — who is due to be inaugurated for his new five-year term on March 31 — would be gone by the end of the term. He also announced the creation of what he described as a "national movement for the liberation of Belarus."

"They have been hiding in their offices and they think they won the elections," Milinkevich said. "But this is a Pyrrhic victory. This is the beginning of the end of those who lie, who cannot talk to people, who use force against people and beat them. Shame on them!" Addressing foreign reporters earlier on March 25 near the Akrestsina detention center, Milinkevich had called upon authorities to refrain from violence, vowing in turn to hold a peaceful demonstration:



Police beating women

"I hope [authorities] won't [use force]," Milinkevich said. "I believe there are also reasonable people on their side. When [a government] constantly resorts to forcible methods, it first of all testifies to its weakness — after all they need to prove they are worth something as men — and, second, it shows that its end is nearing. A country cannot be ruled by these methods, there has to be dialogue, partnership. But they've forgotten what that is. For them [the upcoming rally] is like a final test, a final warning. But we'll be peaceful, this I promise, there won't be any taking of the Bastille."

The March 25 rally was initially due to take place on October (Kastrychnitskaya) Square, where protest rallies had taken place for most of the week that followed election day. But security forces had cleared the square on March 24, arresting scores of protesters. Earlier on March 25, they had blocked all access to October Square, forcing demonstrators to move onto Yanka Kupala Square, in a nearby park. Belarus's Belapan independent news agency on March 25 quoted rights campaigners as saying no less than 328 people were arrested during the March 24 sweep. This figure could not be officially confirmed.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, March 28, 2006

QUOTES of QUARTER

"If human rights and maybe human lives would be trampled down by Lukashenka's regime, he must understand that the European Union and America would be ready to take serious steps, to the extent of excluding Belarus from the OSCE. And then Lukashenka would have to face trial."

ALDIS KUSKIS, European Parliament Deputy, Washington, February 1, 2006

"The actions of OMON (SWAT-type police) were quite something. I have never heard such language addressing a human being, I have never seen such vulgarity. It shocked me."

Accredited Ukrainian TV journalist **HANNA HOROZHENKO** after being forcibly detained covering an opposition rally in Minsk.

The Belarusian government demonstrated "flagrant and total disregard for the democratic process and OSCE values" during the recent presidential campaign in the country,

said the US ambassador to the OSCE **JULIE FINLEY**, at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna on March 30.

Culture & Society

Underground Troupe Brings Cutting-edge Theater to Moscow

By Claire Bigg

The Free Theater of Minsk is a rare voice of dissent in President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Belarus -- it is currently the only drama troupe boldly resisting government pressure and censorship. The company, created less than a year ago, is now coming into the international limelight and played to Russian audiences for the first time last weekend. RFE/RL spoke to playwright Mikalay Khalezin, co-founder of the theater group.

Russian drama lovers got a rare chance last weekend to see the Free Theater in action. This underground theater troupe is popular with emancipated Belarusians, but its performances abroad are still few and far between.

The Free Theater's Russian debut was a success: its three performances at Moscow's Meyerhold Center -- one of the Russian capital's most progressive theaters -- were widely popular.

In Belarus, catching a performance by this troupe is not easy. In a country that the U.S. government has famously dubbed "the last dictatorship in Europe," staging uncensored plays is a dangerous activity. Playwright Mikalay Khalezin says prospective spectators are therefore carefully screened before every performance. "To attend one of our performances, you need to find out a special telephone number, call it, someone will write down your name, then you need to go to a place far from the city center, where you will be identified," Khalezin said. "Seats are booked for many performances in advance, and entering the room [on your own] is almost impossible."

The Free Theater was founded in March 2005 when Khalezin, together with his wife Natalya Kalyada, launched a playwright competition. Over the next few months, they received more than 230 plays from a dozen different countries.The group soon premiered with "4.48 Psychosis," a play by British playwright Sarah Kane dealing with depression and suicide -- two themes that are taboo in state-controlled Belarusian art.

The Belarusian authorities were quick to retaliate. The state-owned theater in Minsk, where the play's young director, Uladzimir Shcherban, used to work, reduced his salary and barred him from staging plays.

Since then, actors, directors, and playwrights involved in productions by the Free Theater have often run into trouble. Owners of bars and clubs have also suffered repercussions after letting the theater use their premises.

But this has done nothing to dampen the determination of the troupe, which continues to dodge censors by renting out premises for alleged "corporate parties" or even performing in private flats.

After winning over fans at home, the company rapidly attracted international attention. The theater has gained the staunch support of a number of luminaries, including British playwright Tom Stoppard, U.S. playwright Arthur Kopit, and former Czech President and playwright Vaclav Havel.

The Free Theater so far has only three plays in its repertoire. "Technique Of Breathing In A Vacuum," by Russian playwright Natalya Moshina, tells the story of a girl with cancer. "We. Self-Identification" is based on trivial conversations recorded by one of the actors on the building site of the National Library in Minsk -- a construction project closely supervised by Lukashenka, the former collective farm director who has ruled Belarus with an iron fist for the past 12 years.

In the final scene, the four actors, dressed in black workers' dungarees and orange safety helmets, recite texts about slavery by Socrates and Aleksei Losev, a prominent Russian philosopher who was sent to labor camps for rejecting Marxism. Khalezin describes the play as a "contemporary vision of slavery." One passage from a scene reads: "In a sense, the slave looking after his master is freer than the latter, since he has the option of running away from him. The master, however, cannot hide from himself."

"We. Self-Identification" is seen by many as the Free Theater's most political work. Khalezin, however, balks at the label of "political theater." "The actors, the directors, and us, the theater's founders, do not consider ourselves [to be] political theater," Khalezin said. "Political theater is boring. The fact that our aesthetical position and our views on the freedom in art differ from those of the authorities have enabled journalists and society to say: 'this is political theater.' No, we do not declare any political idea. The only thing we declare is freedom in art and the morality of those involved in theater."

If the Free Theater has no political agenda, then what makes it so subversive in the eyes of the authorities? Khalezin says Lukashenka's authoritarian regime, which he describes as "collective farm-like," has failed, unlike the Soviets and the Nazis, to establish an aesthetic platform to promote its doctrines.

The Belarusian leadership, he says, therefore feels threatened by any form of individual artistic expression that illustrates present-day dilemmas.

Despite the pressure and obstacles, the Free Theater manages to deliver cutting-edge, effervescent performances -- and Khalezin says the troupe is determined to fight for its right to do so until Lukashenka's regime comes to an end.

"Dictators don't live forever," Khalezin said. "Each of us will take his or her own place in history -- he will take one place, and we will take another." European spectators will have to wait a little longer for a chance to meet the Free Theater since it has suspended all performances abroad until the end of the presidential elections, slated for 19 March. Khalezin says it is particularly important for the troupe to be in Belarus during the vote, which is widely expected to be rigged.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, February 7, 2006

ECONOMY

Controls, Subsidies, and Cheap Gas in Belarus

By Siarhej Karol

The "Belarusian economic model" seems to defy economic theory. An economy entirely consisting of the old, unreformed Soviet industrial base, manages to churn out high single digit growth in gross domestic product (GDP), provides guaranteed monthly income and full, if not always full-time, employment, even as it remains in a state of complete isolation from the modern world. It is this model that causes Belarusians to feel fearful of changes that may unleash a chaos, criminality, and suffering associated with reforms in Russia and Ukraine -- the reference countries for the average Belarusian. The model is based on three foundations: a favorable valuation of Russian energy, efficient internal controls, and supply-side problems that beset the rest of the former USSR, where most Belarusian output is exported.

The total effect of the energy price discount amounts to over $7 billion a year, or thirty percent of nation's GDP.

Russia charges Belarus $47 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas and $27 per barrel of oil compared to world prices of $230 and $60, respectively. For a country consuming about 20 billion cubic meters of gas per year and 250,000 barrels of oil per day this amounts to direct fiscal support of $6.6 billion annually. Besides consuming oil for its own needs, Belarus is also reselling it in the form of refined products processed at the two refineries whose capacity far exceeds the country's internal needs. Statistics confirm that the country imports about 100,000 barrels a day more than it consumes.

The overall usage of oil began to increase from 2002, the time of the first jump in oil prices, and has continued upward since. According to a study by Belarusian economic expert Leanid Zaika, in 2005 the share of Belarusian exports to Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States was only 45 percent, compared to the stable 80 percent in the preceding decade. The main user of Belarusian exports (36 percent) is now Europe, by way of buying refined petroleum. Purchased at $27 and sold at $60, this petroleum yields 100 percent profits, or $1.3 billion a year of not even a subsidy, but pure disposable income to the state.

The total effect of the energy price discount amounts to over $7 billion a year, or 30 percent of the nation's GDP. This is a staggering proportion -- even in the United Arab Emirates this share is under 10 percent -- but is it really a subsidy? President Vladimir Putin of Russia thinks so. Marshall Goldman, a Harvard economist, quotes him as affirming the use of energy subsidies for political influence in the near abroad. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka of Belarus disagrees. "The notion that I am supported by the Kremlin is absolutely absurd," he stated earlier this year. According to him, the discount on the Russian fuel is really a barter payment for transit through Belarus, for which Russia nominally pays very little.

Simple arithmetic can check this hypothesis: the $183 per 1,000 cubic meters that Russia loses by selling gas to Belarus equals a transit charge of $18 per 1,000 cubic meters per 100 kilometers. The European average is $2.5. So, by bartering $183 away from the price they could charge, the Russians effectively pay Lukashenka seven times the European average cost of gas transportation. Figures for oil are not readily available, but it is reasonable to expect a comparable valuation.

Whether this is a fair deal is in the eyes of the beholder, but it is the valuation on which the entire Belarusian economy is based. It supports the second main feature of the Belarusian model --its relatively effective management. Lukashenka, who portrays himself as an anticapitalist crusader, is in fact the country's chief businessman. He presides over a company that has reached the scale of a nation. Almost all Belarusians work for the state enterprise, run by the "vertical," a hierarchy of administrators appointed by the president. This state-owned corporation, Belarus Inc., is a multiline conglomerate with revenues of about $25 billion that would place it in the top segment of the Fortune 500 list. It employs over 4 million workers and controls the services, health-care, and education sectors.

While controls disintegrated in Russia and Ukraine, in Belarus they were preserved and even improved by introduction of the vertical and appointment of the personally loyal corps. As Zaika points out, for some time this created a competitive advantage --while the dilapidated Russian competitors went through catastrophic reforms, their output fell, creating a gap in supply of low-quality, cheap goods, which Belarusian enterprises were able to fill. Exports to Russia were stable throughout most of the Lukashenka reign, helped in part by an arrangement that some payment for Russian energy comes in the form of Belarusian products.

Two significant risks threaten this model. First, is the risk of a repricing of the energy valuation if Russia gains a controlling stake in Beltranshaz, Belarus's gas-transport company. Deprived of its transit monopoly, Belarus would lose a key bargaining advantage and could be forced to pay higher rates. In practice, however, the current valuation is likely to continue, as political considerations will likely prevail as long as Belarusian policies remain in the Russian wake. Even so, Lukashenka has made statements implying that he fully understands his dependency on Russian energy and is seeking to reduce that dependency and to promote more frugal energy use.

A greater risk comes from within the system. In the 12 years of Lukashenka rule there has been no investment to

modernize the 1950s asset base that is now 80 percent worn out. The oil windfall of recent years has been spent, not invested in the future. In the meantime, Russian competitors are beginning to reap the fruits of the painful restructuring, and foreign competitors produce in low-cost locales. This is beginning to show in statistical data -- Zaika's study cites 2005 decreases of between 10 percent and 70 percent in key Belarusian exports to Russia, and inventories of unsold products are growing. As the industrial output declines, the Belarusian GDP relies increasingly on refining Russian oil for speculation.

This opens the future for several scenarios. One could be called "Singaporization." Lee Kwan Yu ruled Singapore for 30 years as a dictator but he also opened the country up for trade, welcomed foreign investors, guaranteed their rights, and achieved the level of living that surpassed that of Britain by using a mix of market economy and state planning. The Belarusian regime is well positioned to do the same, more likely seeking partners in the East than in the West, but its insecurity about foreign investors and bad reputation may impede this scenario.

Another scenario is a complete change of power. Besides being unlikely, it also poses the danger of energy repricing, as in Ukraine. The disintegration of internal controls that scenario would provoke could mean a delayed period of chaos and potential return to populism.

Finally, conserving the current arrangement is also possible, as long as Russia does not challenge the status quo in exchange for political subservience. This would not remove the problem of the worn-out assets and obsolete technologies, but it seems to be the bet the Belarusian president is making at the moment.

Siarhej Karol, a chartered financial analyst, is a financial manager at American International Group, a global financial services company.

Source: RFE/RL Newsline, March 16, 2006 (End Note).

QUOTES of QUARTER

" A prerequisite of a free and fair election is that you don't beat up opposition candidates or opposition supporters and throw them in jail. And we think that there is not enough outrage and international attention on Belarus generally..."

National Security Advisor **STEPHEN HADLEY** after learning that an opposition candidate was beaten up by security forces in Belarus.

In any democracy "there is certain transition period" that in some countries "lasted few centuries..."

Newly appointed Russian Ambassador **ALEKSANDR SURIKOV** at a press conference in Minsk on March 14, 2006.

" No one will be fooled by this election result or indeed by the whole election."

European Commission Vice-President **GUENTER VERHEUGEN**

NEWS BRIEFS

The source of items in the NEWS BRIEFS section is the RFE/RL Newsline, unless otherwise indicated.

1. POLITICAL OPPOSITION

February 1, 2006

OPPOSITION CANDIDATE INVITES EU POLITICIANS TO OBSERVE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN BELARUS

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition forces' candidate for the 19 March presidential election, appealed in Brussels on 31 January to EU lawmakers and politicians to travel to Belarus for the election, RFE/RL's Brussels correspondent reported on 31 January. Milinkevich was speaking to the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. "It would be good if you could set aside some time toward the end of March and travel to Belarus as international observers," Milinkevich said. "You will be obstructed, prevented from carrying out observation work, but [nevertheless] your arrival in our country for the elections will have a great significance for democratically oriented Belarusians, especially in the countryside. They must see that Europe is not turning away from us." Milinkevich stressed that the presence of EU politicians and officials would act as a shield for the protesters he expects will take to the streets a day after the poll. "I would ask for the help of all those who want to help us, to arrive [whether as observers or not] before [the elections] and stay on for a few days after 19 March. It could soften the blow that Lukashenka has already promised," he added.

February 3, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE MEETS WITH GERMAN CHANCELLOR.

Opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin on 2 February, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The meeting was also attended by Milinkevich's allies in the presidential election campaign: Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka, and Belarusian Party of Communists leader Syarhey Kalyakin. "Ms. Merkel was primarily interested in the election and its possible falsifications as well as in the media," Vyachorka told RFE/RL. "As a person who has her own experience from a totalitarian country -- she lived in the German Democratic Republic — she understands the situation [in Belarus] very well. In this context she expressed her solidarity with us and her understanding of our democratic goals.



Chancellor Merkel with Milinkevich

Febr. 16, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRO-DEMOCRATIC FORCES ADOPT MILINKEVICH'S ELECTION PROGRAM.

The Political Council of the United Democratic Forces adopted on 15 February the election program of Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition presidential candidate in the country's 19 March vote, BelaPAN reported. "This program is a clear and specific message to the people of Belarus, which shows what the country will be like if the united pro-democratic forces win," Milinkevich said. The program sets seven priorities: family and health; respect for labor and decent pay; just laws and a responsible government; economic freedom, an open country and an open world; science and progress; and national revival. Milinkevich believes that its implementation could "create half-a-million new jobs and ensure an increase in average monthly pay to 550 euros through new markets, new investments and growth in labor productivity."

February 17, 2006

BELARUSIAN CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION REGISTERS FOUR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES...

The Central Election Commission (TsVK) on 17 February registered four contenders for the 19 March presidential vote, Belapan reported. They are Liberal Democratic Party leader Syarhey Haydukevich; Alyaksandr Kazulin, former rector of Belarusian State University; incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka; and united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich. The TsVK registered Lukashenka with 1,903,069 validated signatures in his support; Milinkevich with 183,179, Haydukevich with 144,663, and Kazulin with 143,382.

Febr. 23, 2006

OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE VOWS TO FREE BELARUS FROM FEAR...

Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition candidate in the 19 March vote, pledged in a televised address to voters on 22 February to radically change the style of governance and free his country from the grip of fear. "Authorities in a future Belarus will be elected, not appointed," Milinkevich said. "The person will be given priority over the state. The government will not rule the person, but the person will determine the country's policies.... Freedom will give people an opportunity to lead a decent life." Milinkevich said the opposition is against staging a "colored revolution" in Belarus like those that followed elections in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. But he added that if the authorities rig the election, people will have the right to take to the streets to defend their votes. "If people take to the streets, we, on our part, will do everything so that this will be a peaceful demonstration as required by the constitution. And we hope very much that the authorities will act in the same manner and not use force," Milinkevich said.

...AS ANOTHER QUESTIONS INCUMBENT'S RIGHT TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT...

Presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, whose prerecorded address to voters was aired by Belarusian Television immediately after that of Milinkevich, said incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has no right to be on the ballot for the 19 March presidential election. Kazulin stressed that Lukashenka violated the constitution by calling a referendum in 2004 to lift the constitutional two-term limit on the presidency in Belarus. Kazulin added that Lukashenka's decision to schedule the election for March, four months before the expiration of his current term, was also in violation of the constitution.

...AND BROACHES SOME DETAILS OF INCUMBENT'S MARITAL LIFE

Kazulin said in his address to voters that Belarusian Television did not allow him to show his wife, Iryna, together with him in the studio. According to BelaPAN, Kazulin was reacting to recent allegations by Belarusian Television that he is divorced and is lying when he tells the public that he is married. Kazulin went on in his address to allege that the nation has never seen the first lady, Halina Lukashenka, together with her husband over the entire course of his 12 years in office. Kazulin claimed Lukashenka lives with another woman -- whose mother is former Health Minister Lyudmila Pastayalka— and has a son with her.

March 3, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE HOLDS UNSANCTIONED RALLY...

Some 3,000 people came to an unauthorized rally in downtown Minsk on March 2, following an appeal by united opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "Dear friends, I congratulate you -- freedom, justice, and the truth are coming to Belarus. And we will win the right to live as humans, to live in Europe and to be a free country. Long live Belarus!" Milinkevich told his supporters at the rally, which was the largest antigovernment demonstration in Belarus in the past several years. Some 1,000 police were deployed around the site of the planned rally but the demonstration, which took place nearby, went without any incidents.

March 6, 2006

BELARUSIAN CENSORS EDIT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGN BROADCASTS

Censors removed seven minutes from presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin's campaign address broadcast by Belarusian Radio on March 6, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported, quoting Kazulin's spokeswoman Nina Shydlouskaya. Shydlouskaya said that missing from the original address were quotes about elite police unit commander Dzmitry Paulichenka, who is suspected of involvement in high-profile disappearances in Belarus; remarks about the personal history of incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his sons; Lukashenka's 1995 quote praising Hitler; and a passage concerning Kazulin's beating and detention by police on March 2. Censors also removed a comment from the same day's radio address of united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, in which he mocked Lukashenka, who holds a college degree in history, for his ignorance. Milinkevich recalled Lukashenka's erroneous assertion at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk last week that prominent Belarusian printer and Bible translator Frantsishak Skaryna (1490-1552) lived in St. Petersburg in Russia. St. Petersburg was founded more than 150 years after Skaryna's death.

March 6, 2006

BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE FILES COMPLAINT ABOUT BEATING

Presidential candidate Kazulin has filed a complaint with the Prosecutor-General's Office about his beating and arrest by "unknown men in black" in Minsk on March, BelaPAN reported. Kazulin told journalists that he was beaten not only in the lobby of the cultural center where he tried to register for the All-Belarusian People's Assembly held in Minsk on the same day, but

also in the minibus into which the "men in black" pushed him. "They loaded me like a ram, folded me double, and sat down on me in addition," Kazulin said. "Kazulin wanted that [beating] and he did not conceal that. And we received information from the mouth of Kazulin, who said that he would create an image [for the media] by every means and would stop at nothing," Belarusian Interior Minister Uladzimir Navumau said on Russia's Channel One on March 5. "[These actions against Kazulin and his supporters in Minsk on March 2] reinforce our fears that a free election process will be compromised and we have called on and we will continue to press the authorities in Belarus to release the individuals detained and to conduct an impartial investigation into the beating of the leader of the opposition and to hold the perpetrators accountable," U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said on March 3.

March 15, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE MEETS WITH 5,000 IN HOMEL.

Some 5,000 people attended a meeting with opposition presidential candidate Milinkevich in Homel, southern Belarus, on March 14, BelaPAN reported. "It is a disgrace when a country's leader is not welcome in any European country for 10 years," Milinkevich said in Homel. " It's lies that no one needs us. The world needs a free and democratic Belarus. We'll be in Europe because we are Europe." The rally was held at a soccer stadium. Milinkevich's campaign team had to scrap its initial plans for a rally at a square in downtown Homel as truckloads of snow had been brought to the venue from across the city days before the event.

March 20, 2006
OPPOSITION SAYS OFFICIAL RESULTS ARE FRAUDULENT

United opposition candidate Milinkevich on March 19 alleged massive electoral fraud and called for a repeat presidential election, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service reported. "I believe this civil confrontation can be resolved by [holding repeat] elections, in which representatives of all candidates will be represented in election commissions," Milinkevich told journalists. Later the same day, Milinkevich took part in a rally of more than 20,000 opposition supporters on October Square in Minsk. "We have won and it does not matter what they announce," Milinkevich told the crowd, the largest opposition rally in the past 10 years. "They will announce a ridiculous percentage [for Lukashenka]. We have won because people believe they can stand up for freedom, truth, justice, and their own dignity. The authorities were threatening them, saying there were terrorists with plans, but despite this, people have come out. This is a victory over fear." Milinkevich called on his supporters to gather on the same square on March 20.

March 20, 2006
INDEPENDENT POLLSTER SAYS RELIABLE EXIT POLLS IN BELARUS IMPOSSIBLE

The Vilnius-based Baltic Surveys/Gallup Organization pollster, which conducted an exit poll during the 2004 constitutional referendum in Belarus, said in a press release on March 19 that it would be impossible to conduct an independent and reliable exit poll in Belarus during the presidential election. The pollster added that it decided to abandon its plans to hold such a poll due to activities of the Belarusian authorities. "It was clear from the outset of this project several month ago that the Belarusian security services were attempting to stop the exit polling, intimidating interviewers and supervisors, conducting an obvious disinformation [campaign] about those participating," said Baltic Surveys Director Rasa Alisauskiene. Two Belarusian government-sponsored pollsters reportedly conducted an exit poll during the presidential ballot, announcing just two hours after the opening of polling stations in March 19 that President Lukashenka was winning with more than 80 percent of the vote. Meanwhile, the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), a Russian government-controlled sociological agency, has said that it found in the first half of March that 60 percent of Belarusian voters were planning to vote for Lukashenka and 11 percent for Milinkevich, BelaPAN reported on March 20.

March 21, 2006
BELARUS OPPOSITION CHALLENGES LUKASHENKA'S VICTORY FOR THE SECOND DAY...

Some 7,000 demonstrators gathered on October Square in Minsk on March 20 to protest the officially announced results of the March 19 presidential vote and demand a repeat election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The Central Election Commission announced earlier the same day that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was re-elected for a third term with nearly 83 percent of the vote, while united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich was backed by 6 percent of voters. Milinkevich alleged that the vote was fraudulent and illegitimate, saying that Lukashenka had no right to seek a third term. "We don't recognize the election results. In Belarus there was no election, but an unconstitutional seizure of power," Milinkevich told journalists. On March 19, shortly after the closure of presidential polls, more than 20,000 people rallied on October Square in support of Milinkevich..

March 21, 2006
...AND SEEKS TO RESTAGE KYIV'S MAYDAN IN MINSK

Presidential challenger Milinkevich called on his supporters on October Square in Minsk on March 20 to remain on the square all night, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service and BelPANn reported. Several hundred people stayed with Milinkevich and another opposition candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, on the square until morning and erected 18 tents, in an apparent emulation of the tactic of the Ukrainian opposition, which erected a stage on Independence Square (Maydan Nezalezhnosti) and a tent city on Khreshchatyk Boulevard in Kyiv during the Orange Revolution in 2004. "We must remain on this square. This square is ours. It is Belarusian land. We were here last night and we started fighting for truth and freedom. For Truth! For Justice!" Milinkevich told the crowd on October Square. Police cordoned off the square but restrained from using force against people remaining there. RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported that police arrested some 30 opposition activists in Minsk during the night, including opposition leaders Anatol Lyabedzka and Alyaksandr Dabravolsk

March 23, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CONTINUES ANTIPRESIDENTIAL RALLY IN MINSK

Some 5,000 people gathered on October Square in Minsk on the evening of March 22 to join several hundred opposition activists who have been keeping vigil on the square since the evening of March 19, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported.

The opposition is demanding a repeat of the March 19 presidential vote, which was condemned by monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as neither free nor democratic. United opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich told the crowd on March 22 that, according to "various sources," he received 31 percent of the vote while President Alyaksandr Lukashenka garnered 42 percent. Milinkevich also said the Belarusian election has not been accepted by the "civilized world," adding that its official results were recognized only by Russia and Iran. Milinkevich once again called on Belarusians to come to October Square on March 25, the 88th anniversary of the short-lived Belarusian Democratic Republic, which was established in defiance of the Bolshevik center in Moscow. "On this day we should demonstrate that we are not slaves," he stressed.

2. REGIME ACTIONS and STATEMENTS

January 17, 2006

TWO CZECH SENATORS DENIED BELARUSIAN VISAS.

Czech Senators Karel Schwarzenberg and Jaromir Stetina have failed to receive visas to visit Belarus, where they planned to meet with opposition politicians, CTK and Belapan reported on 13 January, citing statements they released. The senators intended to meet with presidential candidates, including opposition contender Alyaksandr Milinkevich, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and journalists. "This did not surprise me," Stetina said in his statement. "A regime that is able to imprison and kill its political opponents must naturally take quarantine measures against the penetrating viruses of democracy." The Belarusian Embassy in Prague and the Belarusian Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the visa refusal, according to Belapan.

January 19, 2006

MINSK INVITES ELECTION MONITORS FROM POST-SOVIET AREA.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry has invited organizations from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Community to monitor the 19 March presidential vote in Belarus, Belapan reported on 18 January, quoting the ministry's press service. Minsk has not yet invited the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to observe the poll. Last week, the Belarusian authorities were urged to do this by Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht, OSCE chairman in office .

January 2, 2006

MINSK INVITES OSCE ELECTION MONITORS.

Belarus has invited monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe the 19 March presidential election, the ministry's website (http://www.mfa.gov.by) reported on 19 January. The previous day the ministry's press service informed about the invitation of monitors from the Commonwealth of Independent States for that electio.). ODIHR spokeswoman Urdur Gunnarsdottir told RFE/RL's Belarus Service on 19 January that before taking a decision on sending its monitors to Belarus, the ODIHR will dispatch a fact-finding mission to that country. Gunnarsdottir said she sees no problem in the fact that Belarus's presidential vote will be followed by parliamentary elections in Ukraine one week later. "We have had experience in sending monitors to more than one country at the same time," she noted.

January 25, 2006

POLL SAYS MORE THAN 54 PERCENT WANT TO VOTE FOR LUKASENKA

According to a poll conducted by the Gallup/Baltic Surveys in the first half of this month, 54.6 percent of Belarusians said they would vote for Lukashenka if a presidential election was held on 15 January, Belapan reported on 23 January. Of those polled, 16.8 percent declared they would vote for united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, while 2.9 percent intended to cast ballots for independent candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin. Nearly 80 percent of respondents said they had heard or read about Milinkevich. Of those, 55 percent saw him in a positive light, while 25 percent had a negative attitude toward him.

January 30, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS WEST WANTS POSTELECTION RIOTS...

Alyaksandr Lukashenka said in an interview broadcast by Belarusian Television on 27 January that the West has provided money to his opponents for postelection street riots, Belapan reported. "They [the opposition] will contest [their defeat in the presidential election] the way they never did before. Why? Because they've got money [for the purpose]," Lukashenka said. "They have been paid money for street riots. Our 'friends' in the West told the opposition that they would provide money only to fund unrest in the country," he added. Lukashenka reiterated his conviction that opposition leaders will flee the country following the presidential election. "Those who manage this process, who currently oppose the president...have already secured a place for themselves [abroad], maybe in Germany, maybe in America, maybe in Poland following in the footsteps of some famous opposition figures," Lukashenka asserted.

...DENIES BEING SUPPORTED BY KREMLIN...

In the same televised interview on 27 January, Lukashenka denied the widespread opinion that he enjoys support from the Kremlin ahead of the 19 March presidential election, Belapan reported. "Saying that the Kremlin supports me is complete nonsense," Lukashenka said. "But it is a fact that President Putin would like Lukashenka to remain Belarus's president, as he frankly tells me about this and it can probably be guessed from his behavior. And why can he not want this? He is not giving me money for this anyway."

...AND TELLS BELARUSIANS THEY DON'T NEED 'ANY OTHER' PRESIDENT.

Lukashenka also told Belarusian Television on 27 January that his work to fight emergencies and care for ordinary people in the country earns him the right to be their president in the future, Belapan reported. "I'm fighting these disasters to save our people and prove during this election campaign, prove yet another time that you have a normal president and don't need any other president," Lukashenka said. "Even during the severe freeze this year there were fewer breakdowns and less disorder than in previous years when temperatures did not drop as low. What does that speak of? That means that the government is busy solving people's vital problems," he added.

February 6, 2006

BELARUS'S 74,000 ELECTION COMMISSION MEMBERS INCLUDE TWO OPPOSITION REPRESENTATIVES

Belarusian authorities have selected 74,107 people for 6,586 precinct election commissions for the 19 March presidential vote,

RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported on 3 February. Belarusian opposition parties, which proposed more than 1,000 candidates for the commissions, obtained just two seats: one for the United Civic Party (AHP) and the other for the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada). "A blatant, mass falsification [of the vote] is being prepared," AHP leader Anatol Lyabedzka told RFE/RL. "If the authorities had been confident even of 50 percent about their strength, they would at least have made an appearance of some pluralism. It is another confirmation...that there will be no election, that a falsification is under way."

February 7, 2006
BELARUS SAID TO BLOCK U.S.-EU VISIT.

A high-level visit to Belarus by U.S. and EU officials has been cancelled after Belarusian authorities failed to issue visas, Reuters reported on 3 February. The officials -- Robert Cooper, director-general for external and political-military affairs at the Council of the European Union, and Dan Fried, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Europe -- had planned to discuss the 19 March presidential election during the trip. "We are both disappointed by the failure of the Belarusian authorities to take this opportunity to engage in an open and frank dialogue with the international community," the officials said in a statement publicized by State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. Meanwhile, Belarusian Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Papou told journalists on 4 February that Minsk did not refuse visas to Cooper or Fried but only proposed to them to make separate visits, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "It looks as if the United States has now begun to make decisions for the European Union as well, including on establishing relations with Belarus," Papou added.

February 8, 2006
BELARUS EXPANDS DEPORTATION GROUNDS FOR FOREIGNERS.

The Belarusian government has adopted new rules for the deportation of foreigners, Interfax reported on 7 February, quoting Alyaksey Byahun from the Interior Ministry. "The regulations provide for an expanded list of reasons for which foreigners can be deported from Belarus," Byahun said. "[The new rules include] a provision stating that a foreigner should be deported if his/her stay in Belarus poses a threat to national security, public order, or health of the nation." Byahun noted that the enforcement of the new deportation rules should not be linked to the upcoming presidential election in Belarus. "It's a mere coincidence," he added.

February 23, 2006
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT URGES TIGHTER SECURITY

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 21 February called on law-enforcement agencies to step up security measures in the runup to the 19 March presidential election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belarusian Television reported. Lukashenka was speaking at a conference in Minsk with leaders of the Defense and Interior Ministries, the Committee for State Security (KGB), the State Border Troops Committee, and the State Customs Committee. "You know in detail what pressure has been exerted on Belarus -- from overt blackmail to attempts to interfere in [our] domestic affairs on the part of the West, and from petty provocations to threats and extremist manifestations on the part of the opposition," Lukashenka said. "Realizing the lack of chances for a legal win, opponents of the authorities sweat their guts out to fuel tensions in the country, loosen the foundations of the state and society, and blacken our spiritual values. Therefore, our main task is to hedge the Belarusian people against imposing the alien will, lies, and violence [on them].... Now in the first place it is necessary to act preemptively."

February 24, 2006
BELARUSIAN TELEVISION SAYS 77 PERCENT OF VOTERS BACK LUKASHENKA

Belarusian Television reported in its main newscast, "Panarama," on 23 February that "nearly 80 percent" of Belarusians deem the situation in Belarus in the ongoing presidential election campaign to be "quiet," while 3.7 percent "think otherwise." The channel was citing a poll conducted by an organization called the Ekoom Analytical Center involving some 3,000 respondents in all regions of the country in "January-February." The channel said that, according to the poll, 77.2 percent of Belarusians "believe it possible for themselves" to vote for incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the 19 March election. The poll reportedly found that just 2.1 percent of voters wanted to vote for other candidates, while 12.7 percent have not decided whom to support and 8 percent have not decided whether they would go to the polls. The newscast did not mention any of Lukashenka's challengers by name.

February 27, 2006
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ACCUSES WEST OF ENCROACHING ON YOUNG MINDS

Alyaksandr Lukashenka on 24 February accused Belarus's "Western enemies" of trying to take possession of Belarusian youths' minds, BelaPAN reported, quoting official sources. Lukashenka was speaking at a meeting with cadets and lecturers at the Suvorov Military School in Minsk. "Our Western enemies understand perfectly well that the most important thing is to take possession of young people's minds in order to manipulate them and involve them in illegal activities," the Belarusian president said.

According to Lukashenka, the "enemies" are seeking to distort and blacken life in Belarus and undermine "the moral foundations of the young" in order to persuade teenagers that "gain and pleasures are the most important things" in life. "Today many teenagers are not as we want them to be. They grow up frail and lazy, are afraid of physical activities, responsibility, and discipline. An intention to dodge military service is common among some young men," Lukashenka said.

February 27, 2006
BELARUSIAN TELEVISION ACCUSES NGO OF FIXING EXIT-POLL RESULTS

Belarusian Television reported on 26 February that law-enforcement agencies have discovered preprepared protocols of an exit poll that should be held by the Vilnius-based Gallup Institute branch on 19 March, the *Belorusskie novosti* website (http://www.naviny.by) reported. The protocols were reportedly found at an office of the unregistered nongovernmental organization Partnership, four of whose activists were arrested by the KGB last week. The protocols reportedly stated that united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich was backed by 53.7 percent of voters, President Lukashenka by 41.3 percent, Alyaksandr Kazulin by 3.8 percent, and Syarhey Haydukevich by 1.2 percent. The channel commented that the opposition is preparing for "mass falsifications of the election" and a "violent takeover of power."

March 2, 2006

BELARUSIAN KGB ACCUSES OPPOSITION OF PLOTTING COUP...

Stsyapan Sukharenka, head of the State Security Committee (KGB), told journalists in Minsk on March 1 that opposition activists are planning to detonate explosives in a crowd at one of their protests after the March 19 presidential vote and then blame the authorities for the resulting bloodshed, Belapan and Reuters reported. "Blood and victims would give the protest organizers a free hand to seize the buildings of government agencies and train stations, block railroads in order to paralyze the state," Sukharenka said. He noted that the plot is to be carried out by activists of nongovernmental organizations aided by "militants" from Georgia, Ukraine, and former Yugoslav republics. "I do not think that after we have made it public they will take such a step. However, we will keep on monitoring the situation and if they take such a risk, we will find the explosives," Sukharenka added.

March 3, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT ACCUSES WEST OF SEEKING HIS OUSTER...

Alyaksandr Lukashenka delivered a more than three-hour-long speech to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk on March 2, Belarusian media reported. Lukashenka told the forum, which comprised some 2,500 loyal supporters of his regime, that the West is channeling "hundreds of millions" of dollars to the Belarusian opposition to topple him in the March 19 presidential election. "Hundreds of millions are coming via Ukraine, the Baltic countries, and Poland. We know what embassies receive cash and bring it here, and later distribute the money," Lukashenka said. He claimed that Belarus's State Security Committee (KGB) has recently "busted 72 organizations" that had received "hundreds of millions of dollars, cell phones, computers, [and] already prepared election falsification documents." "On March 19 they will appear [in the streets] with these documents, which have already been prepared, declare one of these bastards [the opposition candidates] the winner and say that the authorities have rigged the vote. It's good that [KGB Chairman] Sukharenka with his guys, who are very few, have smashed this structure," Lukashenka added.

...AND SETS PRIORITIES FOR NEXT FIVE YEARS

President Lukashenka told the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk on March 2 that the government's priorities for the next five years should be "enterprise, the services' sector, science, and social policies," Belarusian Television reported. According to Lukashenka, the government will work to achieve a 50-percent rise in gross domestic product (GDP) and industrial output, and a 40-percent increase in agricultural output in the next five years. "We will not be able to achieve these results through regulation and pressure. One cannot steer the economy using manual instruments only," he noted. Lukashenka also predicted that wages and pensions should double and people's real income should rise by 50 percent within the five years.

March 7 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT S UGGESTS PUNISHMENT FOR INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

President Lukashenka also told the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk on March 3 that the newspaper *Zhoda,* founded by the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada) which is headed by Kazulin, will be closed and its managers will most likely go to prison, BelaPAN reported. Last month the Information Ministry issued an official warning to *Zhoda* for reprinting controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, and the State Security Committee (KGB) instituted criminal proceedings under an article that penalizes the "incitement of racial, national or religious enmity or discord" with either a fine, a six-month jail term, a period of "restricted freedom" lasting up to five years, or a prison sentence of up to five years . "I guess the talk is about the paper of that thug, in which the cartoons were published," Lukashenka said. "Criminal proceedings have been instituted and, if there are grounds for this, everybody will go to prison."

March 10, 2006

BELARUSIAN OFFICIAL EXPLAINS WHY OPPOSITION IS NOT REPRESENTED ON ELECTION COMMISSIONS...

Central Election Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna told journalists in Minsk on March 9 how territorial election commissions were formed for the March 19 presidential vote, Belarusian Television reported. "Our election commissions are formed by taking into account the extent to which these people are suitable for work in election commissions, to what degree they are respected in some societal circle or another," Yarmoshyna said. "Let's look at our backwater traditional opposition. They are mostly unemployed people. Tell me: Can an unemployed person be respected in society? Of course not." Out of some 74,000 people selected for more than 6,500 precinct election commissions for the presidential ballot, only two reportedly represent opposition parties. In December 2004, the European Union imposed a travel ban on Yarmoshyna, holding her responsible for approving the results of a flawed constitutional referendum and undemocratic parliamentary elections held in October 2004.

...AND WHY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES DON'T NEED THEIR HEADS EXAMINED

Speaking to journalists in Minsk on March 9, Yarmoshyna rejected a proposal by opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich that all presidential candidates should undergo a mental health examination, BelaPAN reported. Yarmoshyna said the election authorities have no right to set any additional requirements for the presidential contenders except those specified by the Electoral Code. Milinkevich made the proposal earlier this week, in response to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's speech at the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk on March 2, at which the incumbent called one of his presidential rivals a "moron." "In light of recent events in which one of the candidates, standing behind a podium, called another a moron, it is high time we get a clinical picture of what is going on," Milinkevich said. He added that the country should be ruled by "an even-tempered person whose words and deeds will not be influenced by the change of seasons, air temperature, or pressure fluctuations."

March 15, 2006

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT OBSERVER DELEGATION DENIED VISAS TO BELARUS...

Members of the European Parliament criticized Minsk on March 15 for not allowing them to monitor Belarus's upcoming presidential election, Reuters reported the same day. "We were not granted visas, and the refusal was accompanied by a letter from the Belarus deputy minister for foreign affairs saying that any visit of a European Parliament delegation would be inter-

preted as provocation," said Joseph Muscat, vice-president of a delegation of EU lawmakers seeking to monitor the poll. Bogdan Klich, the president of the delegation, said the refusal showed that the election did not meet international standards.

...AS MINSK DEFENDS THE MOVE.

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on March 15 that unauthorized election observers were planning to "provoke conflicts and...destabilize the situation in the country," Reuters reported the same day. Approximately 1,000 observers are expected to monitor the March 19 election, including more than 400 from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Oleg Vonsyak, a spokesman for Belarusian officials in Brussels, said the delegation from the European Parliament was denied visas because they refused to cooperate with the Belarusian parliament. "We have invited observers from the OSCE but not from the European Parliament. The reason is that the European Parliament doesn't want to work with our parliament," Vonsyak said.

March 16, 2006

BELARUS KGB HEAD WARNS OF FOREIGN-BACKED COUP...

Stepan Sukhorenko, the head of Belarus's KGB, said on March 16 that opposition forces are planning a coup against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and he warned that protests would be treated as "terrorism," Reuters reported. "We are obliged to announce that under cover of elections, a violent attempt to seize power is being planned in the country," Sukhorenko said. "The actions of those who take the risk of going into the streets to attempt to destabilize the situation will be viewed as terrorism," he added. Sukhorenko said that foreigners were part of the coup plot. "Brigades of volunteers are being formed in neighboring states," he said. "The key moment will be detonation of several explosions."

March 17, 2006

GEORGIAN LAWMAKERS DETAINED BY BELARUSIAN BORDER GUARDS.

Nine Georgian legislators who planned to join an international monitoring mission in Belarus were detained at Minsk airport on March 16, international news agencies reported the next day. According to AP, Belarusian officials said the group would be deported back to Georgia. Vasily Kiptenko, a spokesman for the Belarusian border guards, said the nine were detained because "they were not desirable on our territory." He declined to elaborate. The Georgian group was part of a team from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sent to monitor the March 19 presidential election. Andreas Baker, a spokesman for the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly, said assembly officials had been in touch with the Belarusian Foreign Ministry over the detentions, AP reported. The Georgian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the detention "lays bare again the Belarus government's undisguised decision to act in defiance of the universally recognized principles of democracy and transparency in elections."

March 17, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS HE WILL STAY IN POWER UNTIL BELARUS HAS 100 TONS IN GOLD RESERVES.

During a meeting with the Belarusian central bank chief on March 16, President Lukashenka said he planned to stay in office until the country has 100 tons of gold reserves, Reuters and Interfax reported the same day. "You and I are going to be in office until we get 100 tons in gold reserves," Interfax news agency quoted Lukashenka as telling Belarus's central bank chief Pyotr Prokopovich during a visit to the bank's main vault. "Once we accumulate $10 billion in reserves, including 100 tons of gold, we can confidently hand over to someone else." Belarus's reserves currently stand at $1.5 billion, including 25 tons of gold. Prokopovich has said he wants to bring the reserves up to $3 billion by 2010

March 20, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT WINS REELECTION BY LANDSLIDE...

Central Election Commission Chairwoman Lidziya Yarmoshyna announced on March 20 that according to preliminary results, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was reelected in the March 19 election for a third consecutive term with 82.6 percent of the vote, Belarusian media reported. Yarmoshyna added that Lukasenka's election rivals, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, Syarhey Haydukevich, and Alyaksandr Kazulin obtained 6 percent, 3.5 percent, and 2.3 percent of the vote, respectively. Election turnout was 92.6 percent.

March 21, 2006

BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS 'REVOLUTION' FAILED...

President Lukashenka held a news conference for domestic and foreign journalists in Minsk on March 20 in connection with his reelection the previous day, Belarusian Television reported. "First of all, I want to say that the revolution that was talked about so much and prepared for so much has failed," Lukashenka said. "Despite the open foreign pressure, the colossal pressure from outside, we managed to resist. This [pressure] has produced a completely opposite effect -- Belarus is a nation that could not be controlled and one could not pointlessly put pressure on it. The results of the vote showed that with absolute clarity.... The virus of color revolutions affects weakened countries in which [those in] power are stuck in corruption and are deaf to people's concerns. Belarus has strong immunity, which is based on effective power, a strong social policy, and a dynamic economy that does not serve individual oligarchs, but [serves] the welfare of all the people."

March 21, 2006

AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO ROUND UP OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS.

According to Belarusian human rights activists, up to 200 people have been arrested to date in connection with their participation in opposition protests that were launched in Minsk after the closure of presidential polls on March 19, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported on March 22. Several dozen people gathered at the detention center on Akrestsina Street in Minsk on the evening of March 22 in an attempt to find out whether their relatives were taken there from the opposition rally on October Square. Meanwhile, courts on March 22 sentenced dozens of protesters to jail terms of up to 15 days. In particular, Judge Alyona Kraychyk of the Sovetsky District Court in Minsk sentenced Andrey Dynko, editor in chief of the independent newspaper "Nasha Niva," to 10 days in jail. Police officers accused Dynko of uttering obscenities after he got off a bus. The judge found the journalist guilty of "petty hooliganism," ignoring testimonies of journalists who said that Dynko had no time to use

foul language because police pushed him back in the bus even before he got off.

March 24, 2006
BELARUSIAN POLICE BREAK UP OPPOSITION PROTEST IN MINSK.

At 3 a.m. local time on March 24, riot police forcibly dismantled an opposition tent camp on Minsk's October Square, seizing some 300 protesters who had kept vigil there since the evening of March 20 to protest alleged fraud during the March 19 presidential election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The arrested protesters were subsequently transported in trucks to a detention center on Akrestsina Street in Minsk. Colonel Yury Padabed, who was in charge of the operation, said his troops did not resort to violence while making the arrests. "The authoritarian government has once again showed its true face, having failed to withstand the challenges of democracy.... This is the beginning of its end. The government has become afraid of the action planned for March 25," united opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich told Belapan. Earlier this week, the opposition called on its supporters to gather for a large protest rally in Minsk on March 25.

March 24, 2006
MINSK SLAMS WASHINGTON FOR CRITICISM OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

Andrey Papou, a spokesman for the Belarusian Foreign Ministry, said on March 23 that the United States "has no mandate to reject or recognize the results of elections in other independent countries," BelaPAN reported. Papou was commenting on Washington's statement earlier this week in support of the Belarusian opposition's demands to hold a repeat presidential vote.. "It's not the White House which decides on Belarus's president. It's the people who elect the president in our country, and not in the street but at polling stations," Papou said. "The Belarusian side cannot accept lectures from a country where there is no direct presidential election...and where people who have gained fewer votes than their rivals become president," Papou added, in an apparent reference to the 2000 U.S. presidential election.

March 24, 2006
BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT OFFICIALLY DECLARED ELECTION VICTOR.

The Central Election Commission announced on March 23 the final results of Belarus's March 19 presidential election, Belapan reported. According to the commission, 5,501,249 people, or 83 percent of those who took part in the ballot, voted for incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka; 405,486 people, or 6.1 percent, for united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich; 230,664 people, or 3.5 percent, for Syarhey Haydukevich, a member of the House of Representatives and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party; and 147,402 people, or 2.2 percent, for Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada).

March 21, 2006
BELARUS OPPOSITION CHALLENGES LUKASHENKA'S VICTORY FOR THE SECOND DAY...

Some 7,000 demonstrators gathered on October Square in Minsk on March 20 to protest the officially announced results of the March 19 presidential vote and demand a repeat election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The Central Election Commission announced earlier the same day that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was re-elected for a third term with nearly 83 percent of the vote, while united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich was backed by 6 percent of voters. Milinkevich alleged that the vote was fraudulent and illegitimate, saying that Lukashenka had no right to seek a third term. "We don't recognize the election results. In Belarus there was no election, but an unconstitutional seizure of power," Milinkevich told journalists. On March 19, shortly after the closure of presidential polls, more than 20,000 people rallied on October Square in support of Milinkevich (see "RFE/RL Newsline," March 20, 2006).

March 21, 2006
...AND SEEKS TO RESTAGE KYIV'S MAYDAN IN MINSK.

Presidential challenger Milinkevich called on his supporters on October Square in Minsk on March 20 to remain on the square all night, RFE/RL's Belarusian Service and BelaPAN reported. Several hundred people stayed with Milinkevich and another opposition candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, on the square until morning and erected 18 tents, in an apparent emulation of the tactic of the Ukrainian opposition, which erected a stage on Independence Square (Maydan Nezalezhnosti) and a tent city on Khreshchatyk Boulevard in Kyiv during the Orange Revolution in 2004. "We must remain on this square. This square is ours. It is Belarusian land. We were here last night and we started fighting for truth and freedom. For Truth! For Justice!" Milinkevich told the crowd on October Square. Police cordoned off the square but restrained from using force against people remaining there. RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported that police arrested some 30 opposition activists in Minsk during the night, including opposition leaders Anatol Lyabedzka and Alyaksandr Dabravolski

March 22, 2006
ANTIPRESIDENTIAL PROTEST IN BELARUSIAN CAPITAL CONTINUES FOR THIRD DAY.

Some 6,000 people descended on October Square in Minsk on the evening of March 21 to demand that the official results of the March 19 presidential polls giving an overwhelming victory to President Alyaksandr Lukashenka be voided, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. The opposition rally on October Square has been continuing since the evening of March 19, with several hundred demonstrators remaining on the square overnight. United opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich called on his supporters to keep vigil on the square at least until March 25, the 88th anniversary of the formation of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, a short-lived independent Belarusian state. Another opposition presidential candidate, Alyaksandr Kazulin, suggested that the protesters break off their vigil and return to the square on March 25, but the crowd reportedly did not heed him.

March 23, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CONTINUES ANTIPRESIDENTIAL RALLY IN MINSK...

Some 5,000 people gathered on October Square in Minsk on the evening of March 22 to join several hundred opposition activists who have been keeping vigil on the square since the evening of March 19, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and BelaPAN reported. The opposition is demanding a repeat of the March 19 presidential vote, which was condemned by monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as neither free nor democratic. United opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr

Milinkevich told the crowd on March 22 that, according to "various sources," he received 31 percent of the vote while President Alyaksandr Lukashenka garnered 42 percent. Milinkevich also said the Belarusian election has not been accepted by the "civilized world," adding that its official results were recognized only by Russia and Iran. Milinkevich once again called on Belarusians to come to October Square on March 25, the 88th anniversary of the short-lived Belarusian Democratic Republic, which was established in defiance of the Bolshevik center in Moscow. "On this day we should demonstrate that we are not slaves," he stressed

March 27, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS FOR NEW DEMONSTRATIONS.

Opposition leader Milinkevich, meanwhile, pledged new protests aimed at sweeping President Lukashenka from power, international news agencies reported on March 26. "A government, which with bestial savagery...scattered peaceful demonstrators, has completely destroyed its authority and lost the people's support," Milinkevich in a statement quoted by Reuters. "We are determined to continue mass protests against the falsification of the results of the elections. We will not wait five years to free the Belarusian people from the rule of those who long ago lost their legal and moral right to it." On the evening of March 26, approximately 100 people silently gathered at a monument in central Minsk and lit candles to show solidarity with those detained in the police crackdown, Reuters reported. .

3. REPRESSIONS

December 27, 2005
BELARUSIAN WEEKLY FORCED TO CEASE PUBLICATION.

The private weekly "Salidarnasts" (Solidarity) has been forced to suspend publication after the state-controlled distributors refused to sell the newspaper at kiosks and deliver it to subscribers, Belapan reported on 23 December. In November, the state-run company that operates the network of newspaper kiosks and newsstands in Minsk annulled a 2006 distribution contract that it signed with the weekly two months before. Several weeks earlier, Belarus's state postal service, Belposhta, deleted the weekly, along with 16 other independent periodicals, from its subscription catalogue for 2006. Editor Alyaksandr Starykevich said he doubts the weekly can resume publication as long as President Lukashenka is in office. "Salidarnasts" was founded in 1991 and had a print run of 5,400 copies

January 24, 2006
POLICE DETAIN HEAD OF BELARUSIAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S CAMPAIGN

Police in Minsk on 23 January briefly detained Syarhey Papkou, manager of presidential candidate Zyanon Paznyak's nomination group, Belapan reported. Later the same day, police officers approached Papkou again, suggesting that he follow them to a taxi stop, but he refused. "I don't know what's going on -- either the police are trying to intimidate me, or they are just confused, afraid that their bosses will blame them for nonaction," he commented. Papkou also said that on 22 January police briefly detained six people collecting ballot-access signatures for Paznyak for alleged illegal distribution of leaflets. Paznyak, who left Belarus in 1996 and granted asylum in the United States, told "Moskovskie novosti" on 20 January that he will return to Belarus if he is registered as a candidate for the 19 March vote. Paznyak's organization, the Conservative Christian Party, is campaigning for a "popular vote" by calling on opponents of the incumbent president to cast fake ballots on election day and take away the originals, which will be counted later by an independent commission. The goal of the "popular vote" is to find out how many people actually voted against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in order to substantiate possible claims of vote rigging.

February 14
BELARUSIAN COURT SENTENCES FORMER LAWMAKER TO PRISON

Belarus' Supreme Court on 14 February sentenced former opposition lawmaker Syarhey Skrabets to 2 1/2 years in a correctional facility, BelaPAN reported. Skrabets was accused of attempted bribery, involvement in defrauding a bank of more than $500,000 in loans, and illegal business activities, but the court found him guilty only on the fraud charge. Skrabets' brother, Alyaksandr, who was also accused of involvement in defrauding Belarusbank, received a suspended two-year prison sentence with one year of probation. Skrabets was arrested on 15 May 2005 and has been in custody since then. In early September 2005, he declared a bid for president, but his campaign failed to collect the 100,000 signatures required for registration.

February 17, 2006
BELARUSIAN POLICE ARREST PARTICIPANTS OF SOLIDARITY DAY

Police in Minsk on 16 February arrested around 20 people and dispersed the 100 remaining participants in a gathering marking "Solidarity Day," Belapan reported. The stated goal of Solidarity Day is to demonstrate support for imprisoned opposition politicians and the families of prominent figures who disappeared in Belarus in 1999 and 2000. The action was initiated by opposition youth activist Mikita Sasim, journalist Iryna Khalip, and Iryna Krasouskaya, the wife of "disappeared" businessman Anatol Krasouski, on 16 September 2005, the sixth anniversary of Krasouski's disappearance and that of his friend, opposition politician Viktar Hanchar. Krasouskaya suggested that Solidarity Day sympathizers should turn off the lights in their homes and place a lighted candle in a window at 8 p.m. local time on the 16th day of each month for 15 minutes.

February 23, 2006
BELARUSIAN WEEKLY PROSECUTED FOR MUHAMMAD CARTOONS

Belarus's State Security Committee (KGB) has instigated criminal proceedings against the independent weekly *Zhoda* over an article on the Prophet Muhammad cartoon controversy, Belapan and RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported on 22 February. The article was printed in the 17 February issue of the weekly and featured some of the cartoons, which have sparked protests and violence in the Islamic world following their publication in a number of European newspapers. The KGB claims that the article and illustrations in"Solidarity Archipelago"" are punishable under an article in the Criminal Code that forbids the inciting of racial, national, or religious hatred. Abu-Bekir Shabanovich, leader of the Muslim Religious Association in Belarus, told journalists that the reprinted cartoons offend Muslims and are "a political provocation" in the run-up to the 19 March presidential vote. *Zhoda* is the first publication in Belarus to reprint any of the cartoons, which were first printed in the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten*

February 24, 2006
BELARUSIAN KGB ARRESTS FOUR NGO ACTIVISTS

The State Security Committee (KGB) on 21 February arrested Mikalay Astreyka, Alyaksandr Shalayka, Tsimafey Dranchuk, and Enira Branitskaya, all activists from the Minsk-based nongovernmental organization Partnership, Belarusian and international media reported on 23 February. Belarusian Television reported that Partnership, which was set up in 2002, is an illegal group financed by the Washington-based National Democratic Institute. KGB spokesman Valery Nadtachayeu told the channel that the four are suspected of running an organization that "encroaches upon the individuality, rights, and duties of citizens."

March 2, 2006
BELARUSIAN POLICE BEAT, DETAIN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Security forces on March 2 beat and detained presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, who is challenging incumbent President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in the March 19 presidential election, Belapan and Reuters reported. Kazulin, former rector of Belarusian State University, was trying to register for the two-day All-Belarusian People's Assembly, which opened in Minsk on March 2, when plainclothes officers knocked him to the ground, took him out of a hall, and drove him away. Officers also scuffled with journalists, injuring a Reuters television correspondent. Nina Shydlouskaya, a spokeswoman for Kazulin, told Reuters that he is being held at a police station in Minsk. "He has been beaten up quite badly. We don't know what his status is at the moment," Shydlouskaya added.

March 3, 2006
BELARUSIAN POLICE BEAT JOURNALIST COVERING ASSAULT ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

Aleh Ulevich, a journalist with the independent newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussi*, was hospitalized with a head injury and a broken nose after he was brutally beaten and arrested by police in Minsk on March 2, Belapan reported. Ulevich was among reporters who arrived at the Kastrychnitski District police department in Minsk to obtain news about presidential candidate Kazulin, who was arrested earlier the same day. Ulevich and some 20 people were grabbed by plainclothes police officers and pushed into buses. "I was taking pictures of them grabbing people and beating them," the "Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii" website quoted Ulevich as saying by telephone from the bus. "When they ran up to me, I showed them my journalist card, but they did not care. I got a punch in the face. My nose was smashed. They twisted my arms and roughly pushed me into the bus. Half the bus is covered with blood. Kazulin's lawyer has gotten an especially brutal beating."

.March 6, 2006
BELARUSIAN PROSECUTORS WANT OPPOSITION CANDIDATE TO BE TRIED

The Belarusian Prosecutor-General's Office said on March 6 that presidential candidate Kazulin should be subject to criminal prosecution, Belapan reported. The office said Kazulin is guilty of committing "unlawful acts," first on February 17, when he held a news conference at the National Press Center in Minsk without official permission; and again on March 2, when he tried to register as a delegate for the All-Belarusian People's Assembly held that day in the Belarusian capital. According to the prosecutor's office, Kazulin's offenses include insulting and using physical violence against police officers. Police have already instigated criminal proceedings against Kazulin under Criminal Code articles relating to hooliganism. Meanwhile, Central Election Commission Secretary Mikalay Lazavik said on March 6 that Kazulin has so far not committed any violations of electoral regulations that would provide grounds for removing him from the presidential race.

March 6, 2006
BELARUS POLICE CONFISCATE PRINT RUN OF OPPOSITION DAILY WITH CAMPAIGN MATERIALS.

Belarusian police on March 3 seized a print run of 250,000 copies of the Minsk-based opposition-minded *Narodnaya vola* daily, which had been printed in Russia, Belapan reported. *Narodnaya vola* editor in chief Svyatlana Kalinkina told the agency that the police seized the entire print run for an alleged "violation of electoral regulations," but gave her no legal documents or official notice by which to record the seizure. The issue contained information about the beating of presidential candidate Kazulin, his supporters, and journalists by plainclothesmen in Minsk on March 2; an account of a meeting the same day between opposition candidate Milinkevich and voters; and the text of Kazulin's televised address to voters.

March 8, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER FINED FOR MEETING WITH VOTERS...

A district court in Mahilyou, eastern Belarus, on March 7 fined United Civic Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka some $750, finding him guilty of organizing an unsanctioned rally and resisting police officers in the city earlier the same day, RFE/RL's Belarus Service and Belapan reported. Lyabedzka, who is campaigning for Alyaksandr Milinkevich, the united opposition candidate in the country's March 19 presidential election, held an open-air meeting with some 250 voters, following a last-minute refusal by Mahilyou authorities to hold it at a local university. Lyabedzka was detained after the meeting and taken by force to the court. "In the beginning [the authorities] had a more or less favorable attitude regarding [opposition] meetings with voters," Lyabedzka told RFE/RL. "But later they resorted to provocations and attempts to foil these [gatherings]. The authorities began to be afraid that the [opposition presidential] campaign had been gathering pace and that the development of the campaign had not been in their favor."

March 10, 2006
BELARUSIAN REGIME JAILS OPPOSITION LEADER, NINE OTHER CAMPAIGNERS.

Courts in Minsk on March 9 handed down 15-day prison sentences to Belarusian opposition leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, the deputy head of the campaign staff for opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, and nine other Milinkevich campaigners, finding them guilty of organizing unsanctioned meetings with voters in Minsk the previous day, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Vyachorka, Pyotr Babareka, Uladzimir Hrydzin, Alyaksey Makovich, Alyaksandr Paulouski, and Pyotr Tolar received the sentences from Judge Nadzeya Revutskaya in the Maskouski District Court; Dzmitry Kudrautsau, Artsyom Litsvinko, Syargey Lyantsevich and Alyaksandr Zyalko from Judge Mikalay Trubnikau in the Partyzanski District Court. The 15-day sentence will keep the 10 Milinkevich supporters in jail during the remainder of the campaign for the March 19 presiden-

tial election. "The authorities are really very afraid," Milinkevich told RFE/RL. "The success of [our] campaign is obvious. More and more people are getting rid of fear; more and more people do not want to live in humiliation. This can be inferred from the well-attended meetings that we hold. All actions on the part of the authorities testify that they have become hysterical, that they have lost control of their nerves, that the authorities are not even trying to create an illusion of honest elections."

March 13, 2006
POLICE IN MINSK ARREST BELARUSIANS, UKRAINIANS AT OPPOSITION RALLY.

Police detained at least five Belarusians and six Ukrainians immediately after a campaign meeting convened by opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich in Minsk on March 12, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. It was Milinkevich's third meeting with voters in Minsk on that day and was attended by more than 2,000 people. There were also an unspecified number of activists of the Ukrainian organization Student Brotherhood, who came to Minsk from Ukraine. Police also detained Hanna Horozhenko, a journalist of the Kyiv-based Channel 5, while she was reporting live by the telephone to Kyiv. "The actions of the OMON [riot police] -- that was really something. I have never heard such words addressed to a human being, I have never seen such boorishness. I was shocked," Horozhenko told RFE/RL's Belarus Service later the same day, after she spent several hours in jail and was released following an intervention of the Ukrainian Embassy in Minsk. The fate of the other arrested Ukrainians and Belarusians is unknown. "We have come here with a peaceful purpose, to support the Belarusian people. We see that people are intimidated here. They are afraid but they want changes," a Ukrainian girl named Natalka told RFE/RL shortly before her arrest.

March 14, 2006
THREE INDEPENDENT BELARUSIAN NEWSPAPERS SUSPEND PUBLICATION.

Three independent Belarusian newspapers have suspended their publication after a printing house in Smolensk, Russia, annulled printing contracts with them on March 13, Belapan and Reuters reported. Anatoly Guchev, head of the printing plant, told Belapan that the contracts with *Narodnaya volya BDG; Delovaya gazeta*, and *Tovarishch* were discontinued due to "economic and political reasons." "The Belarusian newspapers owed money to the plant and, according to our information, they have been paying with someone else's money," Guchev said. "Besides, we do not want to get involved in their political games. I do not understand why these papers are not printed in Belarus. If they have licenses, why are they being printed in Russia? I don't care whether these are opposition newspapers or not. I'm not a censor. But I will not allow anyone to use the plant for an election battle." The three newspapers were forced to find a printer in Smolensk last year, after state printing houses in Belarus refused to do the job. "The [Belarusian] authorities must have struck a deal with Russian authorities who found a way to pressure the printing house," *Narodnaya volya* deputy editor in chief Svyatlana Kalinkina told Reuters. "It is possible that Belarus will have no independent press on the eve of the election."

March 14, 2006
BELARUSIAN COURTS JAIL MORE OPPOSITION CAMPAIGNERS.

Vasil Berasneu, campaign manager for opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin in Orsha, Vitsebsk Oblast, was sentenced to seven days in jail on March 14 on a charge of petty hooliganism, Belapan reported. Earlier the same day, the Orsha police also arrested Vasil Leuchankau, the local campaign manager for another opposition candidate, Alyaksandr Milinkevich. Berasneu was initially accused of organizing an unauthorized rally, but subsequently the charge was changed to petty hooliganism. Leuchankau is reportedly to stand trial on March 15 on as yet unspecified charges. Also on March 14, a court in Hrodna sentenced Maksim Hubarevich, a member of Milinkevich's campaign team in that city, to seven days in jail on a charge of petty hooliganism. The police officers who apprehended Hubarevich the previous day testified that he had been swinging his arms and shouting obscenities while walking on the street. The same day two courts in Hrodna sentenced activists of the Polish ethnic community in Belarus, Andrzej Poczobut and Jozef Porzecki, to 10 and seven days in jail, respectively, finding them guilty of using obscene language in the presence of police officers. Poczobut and Porzecki remain in opposition to the Union of Poles in Belarus leadership elected in August 2005 under pressure from the authorities.

March 15, 2006
BELARUSIAN POLICE SEIZE ANOTHER PRINT RUN OF INDEPENDENT DAILY

Police in Vitsebsk Oblast on March 14 seized "thousands" of copies of the opposition daily *Narodnaya volya* second print run of the newspaper to be confiscated on its way from the Russian city of Smolensk to Belarus this month, Belapan reported. The truck carrying the print run was stopped at the Belarusian border and later driven to the regional police department in Vitebsk. Editor in Chief Iosif Syaredzich, who was accompanying the shipment, was also taken to the police department. According to Svyatlana Kalinkina, deputy editor in chief, the decision to seize the print run was made by plainclothes security officers at the border checkpoint. "They did not find any flaws in the accompanying documents but decided to seize the print run for its examination," she said.

March 16, 2006
AS ANOTHER BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION FIGURE ARRESTED.

Opposition politician Anatolii Lebedko was arrested on March 15 for carrying unauthorized campaign leaflets, dpa reported the same day. Lebedko's United Civic Party is part of an opposition movement that has united to back a single presidential candidate, Alyaksandr Milinkevich, in the March 19 election. Lebedko was taken into custody on March 15 after police discovered leaflets in the trunk of his car that were not officially registered with authorities, Interfax reported. U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli called the arrest "clearly inconsistent" with Belarusian pledges to hold free and fair elections. "This is just the latest in a continuing series of detentions and sentences that are keeping opposition activists in custody at least through the March 19 election," Ereli told reporters in Washington.

March 22 , 2006
BELARUSIAN COURTS REPORTEDLY PUNISH 50 PROTESTERS

Some 50 people arrested on March 20 and 21 for their participation in the opposition rally on October Square have stood trial in four courts in Minsk, Belapan reported on March 21, quoting human rights defender Tatsyana Ravyaka. Most of them were reportedly given jail terms. In particular, Civil United Party leader Anatol Lyabedzka was jailed for 15 days, his deputy Anatol Dabravolski to nine days, and student activist Tatsyana Khoma for 10 days. "This is the trial of truth and justice. So long as we will have this regime, we will continue to have such trials. Shame on such courts, shame on such judges," Lyabedzka told reporters after leaving the courtroom. According to opposition sources, police apprehended some 110 people in Minsk by the evening of March 21. RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported that police on March 22 apprehended and harshly beat Mikhal Audzeyeu, a participant in the vigil on October Square, while he was trying to get home to change his clothes. Audzeyeu managed to escape and return to the square.

March 28, 2006
BELARUSIAN COURTS CONTINUE TO JAIL OPPOSITION PROTESTERS...

Nine district courts in Minsk on March 27 punished nearly 300 people, mostly youths and students, with jail terms of up to 15 days, finding them guilty of participation in unauthorized opposition protests last week, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Those punished were detained by police either on March 24, during the dismantling of an opposition tent camp on October Square, or on March 25, during a police crackdown on several hundred demonstrators marching toward a detention center on the city outskirts. There have been no official reports on how many people were arrested in Minsk following the March 19 presidential vote, which the opposition considers deeply flawed. "This time the authorities were sensible enough not to use arms. I don't think they are all insane, although there is a lot of hysteria among them," opposition leader Alyaksandr Milinkevich told Reuters on March 27. "They didn't expect so many people to come out on the streets. In fact, Minsk hasn't seen so many protesters on the streets for 10 years. [The authorities] are afraid."

March 28, 2006
...AS WELL AS FOREIGNERS

Oleg Kozlovsky and Eduard Glezin --Russian nationals detained when police stormed the tent camp on October Square on March 24 -- were sentenced in Minsk on March 27 to 15 days in jail, Belapan reported. Aleksandr Padrobinek, a staff writer with the Russian newspaper *Novaya gazeta* received the same jail term. Mariusz Maszkiewicz, a former Polish ambassador to Belarus detained on October Square on March 24, also received a 15-day jail sentence. So far there has been no official information regarding the fate of Canadian freelance journalist Frederick Lavoie, who was reportedly arrested in Minsk on March 24. Those jailed also include two Ukrainians, two Georgians, and a Polish woman. According to the Belarusian Association of Journalists, a total of 41 journalists, including 12 foreigners, were arrested in Belarus from March 14-27. Last week the authorities ordered the deportation of Russian political analyst Vladimir Suzdaltsev, giving him 10 days to leave Belarus. Polish Consul to Belarus Janusz Dabrowski was prevented from entering the country after Belarusian border guards accused him of smuggling illegal literature and attempted to check his baggage.

March 28, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION LEADER REMAINS IN JAIL OUTSIDE MINSK.

Lawyer Ihar Rynkevich on March 25 met with former opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin, leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Hramada), in a remand prison in Zhodzina, some 60 kilometers east of Minsk, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. Kazulin was arrested on March 25 while leading an opposition march toward a detention center on Minsk's Akrestsina Street. According to the lawyer, Kazulin was beaten during his transportation from Minsk to Zhodzina. Kazulin's wife, Iryna, told journalists that he is being investigated for possible violation of an article relating to hooliganism in connection with his attempt to register as a delegate to the All-Belarusian People's Assembly in Minsk earlier this month. Iryna Kazulina added that her husband could also face charges of terrorism in connection with the march.

March 29, 2006
BELARUSIAN COURTS REPORTEDLY JAIL 500 OPPOSITION PROTESTERS.

Some 500 of those arrested in Minsk on March 23, 24, and 25 stood trial in nine district courts in Minsk on March 27 and 28 and were jailed for up to 15 days under an article penalizing the organization of or participation in unsanctioned rallies, Belapan reported. Further trials were expected to take place on March 29. Human rights activist Uladzimir Labkovich claimed that the Belarusian authorities are violating the UN Convention Against Torture. "People were beaten up and threatened when they were arrested. They were not given food and even water for many hours, and not allowed to go to a lavatory," Labkovich alleged. "Transporting people in paddy wagons, handcuffing them like dangerous criminals, forcing them to stand with their faces against the wall in courts, ordering them not to report their names -- these are all torture. Torture is also being applied to their parents. They are denied information about their children's whereabouts for several days." Belarusian human right defenders have reportedly drawn up a list of 53 judges all over Belarus who handed down jail sentences to pro-democratic activists during the country's presidential campaign and ensuing protests. They defenders are going to suggest that these judges be banned from traveling to the EU.

4. BELARUS in WORLD FOCUS

January 27, 2006
GERMAN-LED GROUP TO IMPLEMENT EU BROADCASTING PROJECT FOR BELARUS

EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner announced on 26 January that the European Commission has decided to award 2 million euros ($2.45 million) to a German-led consortium to begin independent media broadcasts into Belarus ahead of the 19 March presidential election, RFE/RL's Brussels correspondent reported. According to the European Commission's press release, the selected consortium includes partners in Poland (European Radio for Belarus), Lithuania (Radio Baltic Wave), Belarus (journalists, civil society, and nongovernmental organizations), and Russia (RTVi). The two-year project will cover radio and television broadcasts, the Internet, support of the Belarusian press, and the training of journalists.

January 31, 2006
EU FOREIGN MINISTERS URGE MINSK TO HOLD FAIR ELECTION...

EU foreign ministers adopted a statement in Brussels on 30 January warning the Belarusian government that they are ready to impose sanctions on Belarus if it fails to observe international standards in the 19 March presidential election, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. The statement urges the Belarusian authorities to ensure unimpeded operation of Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) monitors in Belarus, register freely all eligible candidates and allow them equal access to the state-run media, allow all domestic and foreign media to report freely on the electoral process, and implement OSCE electoral recommendations. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said the measures against Belarus could include visa restrictions and economic sanctions.

...AND MEET WITH BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE.

EU foreign ministers met with Belarusian opposition presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich in Brussels on 30 January, RFE/RL reported. Milinkevich also met with EU foreign-policy chief Javier Solana, External Relations Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, and European Parliament President Josep Borrell. None of Milinkevich's meetings in Brussels were open to journalists. Pavel Mazheyka, Milinkevich's spokesman, told Belapan that the politician called on the EU to ease visa formalities for ordinary Belarusians. Moreover, Milinkevich's talks with EU officials reportedly focused on efforts to set up alternative information sources for Belarus.

February 2, 2006
OSCE TO SEND MORE THAN 400 OBSERVERS FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN BELARUS

Uta Zapf, head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly's Working Group on Belarus, told journalists in Minsk on 1 February that the OSCE is planning to send 400 short-term observers to monitor the 19 March presidential election in Belarus, Belapan reported. Zapf added that a long-term mission of 14 OSCE observers is expected to get down to monitoring the presidential race as early as 6 February. Meanwhile, Urdur Gunnarsdottir, spokeswoman for the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, told Belapan the same day that a 40-strong mission of OSCE observers is expected to arrive in Minsk next week to start the long-term observation of the ongoing presidential race.

February 22, 2006
POLISH-FUNDED RADIO RENEWS BROADCASTS TO BELARUS.

Radio Racja (Radio Reason) based in Bialystok, northeastern Poland, began its new operations on 22 February, PAP reported. The station will be funded by the Polish government, which reportedly pledged 1 million zlotys ($314,000) for its support. For the time being, Radio Racja will broadcast in Belarusian at 6 p.m. local time for one or two hours daily, on medium wave, from a transmitter near Katowice in southern Poland, and on 103.8 MHz from Lithuania, using the frequency and airtime of the Vilnius-based, Polish-language Radio znad Wilii. Within a few weeks, Radio Racja is to begin broadcasts from Poland on the frequency of 105.5 MHz that it used in 1999-2002.

February 24, 2006
EU-FUNDED NEWS PROGRAMS FOR BELARUS TO START ON 26 FEBRUARY.

The European Commission announced on 23 February that the first radio and television programs within a 2 million-euro ($2.4 million) EU broadcasting project for Belarus will be aired on 26 February, RFE/RL's Brussels correspondent reported. "There will also be, before the elections [on 19 March], some election specials, some live programs providing an opportunity for debate on the subjects that arise from the election campaign," European Commission spokeswoman Emma Udwin said. The broadcasting project for Belarus is managed by a consortium led by Germany's Media Consulta and involves partners from Poland (European Radio for Belarus), Lithuania (Radio Baltic Wave), Belarus (journalists, civil society, and NGOs), and Russia (RTVi). Media Consulta Managing Director Harald Zulauf told Belapan that European Radio for Belarus will make daily one-hour programs to be broadcast on medium waves and by satellite. The programs will be available for view at http://www.belradio.fm. RTVi, headquartered in Cologne, is expected to broadcast a 30-minute show for Belarus on Sundays with the assistance of Germany's ZDF television network. The show will be repeated from Monday through Thursday. Belarusian and Russian will both be used in these broadcasts.

February 28, 2006
U.S. PRESIDENT SCOLDS BELARUS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AHEAD OF VOTE.

George W. Bush met in the White House on 27 February with Iryna Krasouskaya and Svyatlana Zavadskaya, whose husbands disappeared in Belarus in 1999 and 2000, respectively, RFE/RL's Belarus Service reported. "This meeting...is intended to underscore our concern about the Belarusian government's conduct leading up to the [presidential] election [on 19 March], harassment of civil society and the political opposition, and failure to investigate seriously the cases of the disappeared," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "We realize perfectly well that this election will not be free or fair, that we will be faced with yet another so-called 'elegant' victory [of President Alyaksandr Lukashenka], but today we need support and help from the outside like air. We should continue working for the future," Zavadskaya said at a news conference immediately after the meeting in the White House.



Pres. Bush with Belarusian widows

February 28, 2006
FOUR CENTRAL EUROPEAN DAILIES SATIRIZE BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT

Gazeta Wyborcza in Poland, *Lidove noviny* in the Czech Republic, *SME* in Slovakia, and *Magyar Hirlap* in Hungary on 27 February published cartoons lampooning Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka in a move of solidarity with satirists in Belarus who have been banned and harassed by authorities. "We'll show the president of Belarus that laughter is the weapon of democracy," *Gazeta Wyborcza's*" headline said. Last year Belarusian prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into a series of satirical Internet cartoons created by activists of an association called Tretsi Shlyakh. Fearing arrest, some of those activists have fled abroad.



Cartoon in the daily SME

.March 1, 2006
POLLSTER DENIES BELARUSIAN TELEVISION'S REPORT ON EXIT POLL FALSIFICATION.

Rasa Alisauskiene, director of the Vilnius-based Gallup/Baltic Surveys, has denied a Belarusian Television report on 26 February accusing the pollster of preparing to falsify an exit poll in the upcoming presidential election in Belarus, Belapan reported. Belarusian Television alleged that law-enforcement agencies had discovered pre-prepared protocols of an exit poll by Gallup/Baltic Surveys which reportedly handed victory to opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich. "We have nothing to do with what was shown," Alisauskiene told Belapan. Alisauskiene noted that Gallup/Baltic Surveys does not plan to conduct an exit poll on the main voting day, 19 March. She added, however, that the pollster may help Belarusian sociological organizations conduct and analyze surveys dealing with the coming election.

March 21, 2006
WASHINGTON THROWS SUPPORT BEHIND BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION. U.S.

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said in Washington on March 20 that the Belarusian opposition has the right to call for a repeat presidential election, an RFE/RL correspondent reported. "We support [the opposition's] call for a new election. We will stand with the people of Belarus and back their aspirations to take their rightful place among the world's democracies," McCormack said. "The United States is preparing to take serious, appropriate measures against those officials responsible for election fraud and other human rights abuses and will be coordinating these steps with the European Union. We call on the regime in Belarus to release immediately those detained during the campaign." Meanwhile, Russian media reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 20 congratulated Lukashenka on his election victory. "The outcome of the elections demonstrates the confidence of voters in your course aimed at further raising the well-being of the Belarusian people," Putin said in a congratulatory telegram.

March 21, 2006
OSCE MONITORS SAY BELARUSIAN ELECTION FAILED TO MEET DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) election-observation mission in Belarus said in preliminary findings released on March 20 that the March 19 presidential ballot in Belarus failed to meet OSCE standards for democratic elections. "Arbitrary use of state power and widespread detentions showed a disregard for the basic rights of freedom of assembly, association, and expression, and raise doubts regarding the authorities' willingness to tolerate political competition," the mission concluded. "A statement by the security services, accusing the opposition and civil society of planning to seize power and associating them with terrorism, contributed significantly to a climate of intimidation and insecurity.... Opposition candidates faced difficulties in conveying their messages to the public, while the coverage of the president was extensive and favorable.... State employees and students were under pressure not to participate in the campaign of the opposition candidates and to vote for the incumbent president."

March 22, 2006
BELARUSIAN OPPOSITION RECEIVES WORDS OF SUPPORT FROM ABROAD.

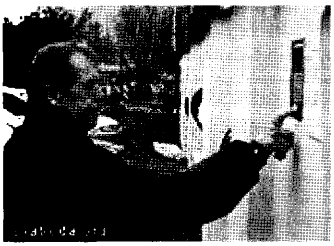
The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry has said in a statement that the March 19 presidential polls in Belarus were held in a climate of fear where there was no freedom of press and candidates did not enjoy equal conditions, and it slammed the vote as neither democratic nor free, Belapan reported on March 21. Vilnius said it supports the Belarusians who have taken to the streets to defend the path of democratic development they chose. The Latvian Foreign Ministry has expressed regret that the election did not met international democratic standards, and it accused the Belarusian authorities of creating obstacles to making a democratic choice. On March 21, the ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic visited demonstrators on October Square in Minsk. "We ambassadors are here because we believe in human rights and the democratic process. This is part of the democratic process -- the right of people to express their views, which is very constrained in Belarus. It is very difficult for people to have a debate, to be able to say what they think and even to be able to vote. And so we are here to show that we are aware of that, and we are here to show that we support people of Belarus," British Ambassador to Belarus Brian Beckett was quoted as saying on the square.

March 23, 2006
POLAND THREATENS SANCTIONS OVER ALLEGED ELECTION FRAUD IN BELARUS.

The Polish Foreign Ministry on March 22 condemned methods used by the Belarusian authorities during the election campaign and the presidential election, Polish media reported. The ministry warned that Poland could impose restrictions against those people responsible for electoral rigging and violating civil rights. "We call upon the Belarusian authorities to stop repressions and return to the policy of respect for basic democratic standards. We expect all political prisoners to be released immediately," the ministry said in a statement.

March 29, 2006
FORMER CZECH PRESIDENT PROTESTS BELARUSIAN VOTE

Former Czech President Vaclav Havel on March 28 protested the way in which the Belarusian government held the March 19 presidential election. However, he was denied entry to the Belarusian Embassy in Prague when he attempted to personally present his protest along with a call for Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to step down, CTK reported. Havel left his letter in the embassy's mail box. Havel was accompanied by three Czech lawmakers who jointly with other Czech public figures and politicians founded the Civic Belarus group to support the Belarusian opposition. Havel said the reaction of the Belarusian Embassy reminded him of the year 1979. "[At that time] my British colleagues Tom Stoppard and Harold Pinter protested against my imprisonment [by the communist regime in Prague]. They, too, brought their protest to the [Czechoslovak] Embassy. They, too, had to cast it in a mail box," Havel said



Pres. Havel delivering his protest

5. BELARUS & the WORLD

February 1, 2006
RUSSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS HE SUPPORTS BELARUSIANS, NOT LUKASHENKA

Russian President Vladimir Putin said during his televised news conference in the Kremlin on 31 January that his frequent meetings with Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka can be explained "not by my support for the regime...but by support for our brotherly Belarusian people," Russian and international media reported. "We are pursuing our balanced policy aimed at developing relations with states and, in this particular case, with the Belarusian state," Putin added. "Special relations between Russia and Belarus have been developing for centuries. There is no comparison between them and the relations Belarus has with France or any other Western European country. Please don't forget that. We remember that now and will remember that in the future."

February 16, 2006
U.S. EMBASSY DEEPLY CONCERNED BY BELARUSIAN STATE MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The U.S. embassy in Minsk on 14 February expressed deep concern over what it calls false statements and conclusions about the U.S. government in Belarusian state media outlets, Belapan reported quoting the embassy statement. "The most egregious example of this disinformation campaign to date was the 7 February Belarusian Television broadcast of the 'Agent 590' series," which "preposterously asserts that the United States government is financing the efforts of sovereign countries to orchestrate scandals in Belarus, with a goal of discrediting the country in the international community," the statement read. The embassy also cited a report aired by Belarusian Television on 13 February, in which Yauhen Novikau, the anchorman of a program entitled "Human Rights: Look at the World," charged that the U.S. Embassy is planning the "liberation of the Belarusian people from dictatorship." The embassy said: "Novikau's statements are not only offensive and irresponsible; they are potentially incendiary to the viewers of his program, who will surely take away a decidedly inaccurate and skewed view of the true purpose of our diplomatic mission here in Belarus."

February 17, 2006
BELARUSIAN EXILED UNIVERSITY RECEIVES OFFICIAL STATUS IN LITHUANIA.

Vilnius announced on 15 February it is granting official status to the European Humanities University (EHU) in Lithuania, Belapan reported. EHU, a private institution funded largely by European educational foundations, national budgets, and the United Nations, was previously based in Minsk but was closed by Belarusian authorities in July 2004, officially due to the lack of buildings for classes. The "unofficial" reason was believed to be the pro-Western orientation of the institution. EHU had around 1,000 students. "Realizing the importance and special position of the university in exile, the Ministry of Education and Science proposed backing the re-establishment" of EHU, a Lithuanian government statement reads. EHU has the right to legally operate in Lithuania until conditions provide for its return to Belarus.

February 23, 2006
MINSK WARNS CZECH EMBASSY AGAINST DISTRIBUTING ALLEGED 'AGITPROP.'

The Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 22 February summoned Czech Charge d'Affaires Vladimir Ruml to express displeasure over the alleged distribution by the Czech Embassy in Minsk of "agitprop materials" in the run-up to Belarus's presidential election, Belapan reported. On its website, the ministry accused the Czech Embassy of "interference in internal affairs" and attempts to "destabilize the internal political situation" in Belarus. The embassy admitted on 20 February that the Czech Foreign Ministry had translated into Belarusian a UN resolution on human rights abuses in Belarus for distribution in that country. A Belarusian Television report aired 19 February showed the translated texts and accused the Czech Embassy of distributing pro-opposition election materials. "The booklets shown in the program are not subversive, as they carry a UN-approved official text," the embassy said in a statement in response to the broadcast.

March 17 , 2006
EASTERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRATS URGE EU TO CHALLENGE MINSK

Past and present democratic leaders from Eastern Europe called on the European Union (EU) on March 17 to take action to challenge Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Reuters reported the same day. Writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili called for new sanctions against Minsk. In a joint letter, former Czech President Vaclav Havel and former Polish President Lech Walesa said the liberals' struggle in Belarus was similar to what they had encountered under communism. "Just like in our countries in those times, the reality in Belarus might seem unchangeable and chances for a

political transformation slim," they wrote in a letter published in the Polish and Czech media. "If the EU is able to truly support civil society, the last undemocratic regime at its borders will collapse," the letter continued. "This may happen as quickly as communist regimes once collapsed. The stronger the opposition is, the less painful the transition to democracy and social transformation will be."

Thoughts and Observations

Has Opposition Scored A Victory over Fear?

By Jan Maksymiuk

Members of the Belarusian opposition rallied for a second consecutive day in downtown Minsk on March 20 to protest President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's election victory. The opposition is claiming that the March 19 presidential poll was flawed and are demanding that a repeat election be held in July. But while the demonstrators' chances of forcing a repeat election are virtually nil, the absence of the expected police crackdown could indicate that they could succeed in altering the country's political climate for the better.

The demonstration that took place shortly after polls closed on March 19 was the largest antigovernment rally in Belarus in nearly 10 years, and united opposition candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich was clearly pleased to see a crowd estimated at 20,000 people turn out on Minsk's October Square. "We have won and it does not matter what they announce, they will announce a ridiculous percentage [for Lukashenka]," Milinkevich said. "We have won because people believe they can stand up for freedom, truth, justice and their own dignity. The authorities were threatening them, saying they were terrorists with plans, but despite this, people have come out. This is a victory over fear."

The next day, during a rally on October Square that attracted approximately 7,000 protestors, Milinkevich made explicit demands for repeat elections. "We demand a repeat of the election in which the legislation of the country will be respected," Milinkevich said. "We demand that representatives of the [presidential] candidates, by all means, are included in the [election] commissions -- something that didn't exist this time. We demand that there are no arrests of people and that those in power abandon the regime of repression during elections." Milinkevich called on the demonstrators to remain on the square all night, a tactic that proved to be successful during Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004. "We must remain on this square," Milinkevich said. "This square is ours. It is Belarusian land. We were here last night and we started fighting for truth and freedom. For Truth! For Justice!" Several hundred demonstrators did remain, and signaled their intention of staying there for the long-term by erecting approximately 20 tents.

Police cordoned off the square and controlled the movement of people between the square, preventing them from providing food and warm clothing to the demonstrators, but did not intervene otherwise.

In the days leading up to the election, President Lukashenka had repeatedly promised to crack down on the opposition, but in the end only about 30 activists outside of the downtown protest were arrested in Minsk. What might have led Lukashenka to not carry out his promise? A huge number of police were reportedly deployed in Minsk for the election period, and they certainly had the opportunity to resort to force when the protesters numbered only in the hundreds overnight on October Square. There are at least two plausible answers. During his news conference for domestic and foreign media on March 20, Lukashenka claimed that the Belarusian opposition is "worth nothing," stating, "That's why we gave them the opportunity to show off, even though it [the rally] was illegal." Perhaps the Belarusian president considered it unfitting to change his mind several hours later, when the opposition organized another illegal rally. The use of force by police would have shown that the opposition was, in fact, "worth something."

Another possibility is that Lukashenka has decided to employ a different tactic to quash the opposition protest on October Square. By confiscating food and clothing supplies intended for the demonstrators, the authorities may be betting on the elements to break the protestors' will. Whatever the reason for doing so, Lukashenka's decision to not use force plays in his favor. Had a potential police intervention turned violent, it may have served merely to strengthen his opponents by radicalizing opposition sentiments. As it turned out, Lukashenka was content enough in his victory to boast during his news conference on March 20 that he had managed to contain the "virus of colored revolutions" in Belarus. "The virus of colored revolutions affects weakened countries in which [those in] power are stuck in corruption and are deaf to people's concerns," Lukashenka said. "Belarus has strong immunity, which is based on effective power, a strong social policy, and a dynamic economy that does not serve individual oligarchs, but [serves] the welfare of all the people."

However, the two days of opposition protests seem to defy Lukashenka's self-congratulatory assertions. While it is highly improbable that the protests could lead to a repeat presidential vote in Belarus, they may significantly contribute to what Milinkevich described during his election campaign as "getting rid of the humiliating fear" in Belarus. If the opposition does not splinter and remains united around Milinkevich in the post-election period, President Lukashenka may find it very difficult or even impossible to run the country the way he did during his two previous terms.

Source: RFE/RL Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova Report, March 22, 2006

Will Moscow Continue to Back Lukashenka?

By Claire Bigg

While Western leaders have openly expressed their distaste for authoritarian Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Russian President Vladimir Putin has consistently supported his regime, both politically and economically. Russia has been providing the country with cheap oil and gas, generous loans, and has cancelled customs duties for Belarusian exports to Russia.

According to official preliminary results, President Lukashenka won a landslide victory in the March 19 presidential election, garnering 82.6 percent of the vote. An official victory would enable Lukashenka, a former collective-farm manager who has ruled Belarus since 1994, to win a third term and remain in office for five more years.

Putin formally congratulated Lukashenka on his victory in a March 20 statement, saying that the "results of the elections point to voters' trust in your policies and to the further growth of the prosperity of the Belarusian people."

Opposition leaders are claiming the vote was rigged and have called for new elections. Several thousand people have massed in a central Minsk square to protest the results. But while the huge margin of victory granted to Lukashenka by the preliminary results has raised some eyebrows, it is widely believed that he does enjoy enough support at home to have won a majority and avoided a runoff. Many political observers say Lukashenka owes his popularity not only to intense propaganda, but also to Russia's robust economic aid, which has allowed him to raise pensions and salaries. But why is Russia throwing its weight behind such a controversial figure as Lukashenka, who has been isolated by most Western leaders and branded a dictator by Washington?

Yevgeny Volk, director of the Heritage Foundation think tank in Moscow, said Russia's support reflects its fears of losing its closest ally in opposition to NATO's eastward expansion. "From the point of view of the Russian political mentality, Belarus is a very important stronghold of resistance to NATO's eastward expansion, a containment of this NATO expansion that is often discussed in Russian political circles," Volk said. "In the Cold War paradigm that is still very present in Russian politics, Belarus plays an important role as a stronghold against NATO."

While the European Union on March 20 expressed its disapproval of the way in which the presidential election was conducted and said it will likely impose sanctions, Russia hailed the vote as free and fair.

Strategic interests aside, Russia has a number of reasons to back Lukashenka. The Kremlin has been anxious to prevent a repetition of Ukraine's Orange Revolution, which swept the Western-leaning Viktor Yushchenko to power in 2005. Some observers also say that by allowing Lukashenka to step into the limelight, Putin's regime hopes to deflect criticism of its own rights violations.

Economically, Russia's warm ties with Belarus may have helped the state-controlled Russian gas giant Gazprom to wrest control of the Belarusian section of the Yamal-Europe pipeline from a reluctant Lukashenka last December. This pipeline carries 10 percent of Russian gas exports to Europe.

But Putin and Lukashenka have not always enjoyed a close relationship. While Russia and Belarus have long planned to join in a union state that would use the Russian ruble as its currency, Lukashenka was severely angered by a proposal Putin made in 2002 under which Belarus would virtually become a part of Russia.

Nevertheless, Heritage Foundation Director Volk said Moscow's support of Lukashenka is unlikely to falter in the future, provided the Belarusian president remains loyal to the Kremlin. "This [support] will take place until a person is found in Belarus who, firstly, will be at least as loyal to the Kremlin as Lukashenka, and secondly will enjoy as much support from the population," Volk said. "So far, not a single politician has satisfied the Kremlin by meeting these criteria. There are people who can be supported by the population, but the Kremlin strongly fears that they will turn to the West like the Ukrainian government."

Other observers, however, say Moscow's backing of Lukashenka could tarnish Russia's image abroad and harm its ties with Western countries, particularly in the aftermath of the March 19 election.

Claire Bigg is an RFE/RL correspondent based in Moscow.
Source: RFE/RL Newsline, March 21, 2006

Belarusians Abroad

January 26, 2006, Strasbourg, France

A visiting delegation of the United Democratic Forces headed by the presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich, which included the Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front Vincuk Viachorka, addressed a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. They later joined a picket line organized by Belarusians living in Belgium and in France.

February 16, 2006, Washington, U.S.A.

Belarus Demonstrations Attracting Growing Attention

Washington, DC (JBANC) --- About seventy people gathered outside the Belarus Embassy in Washington, DC on February 16 in support of democracy in that country and to insist that the regime of "Europe's last dictator" Alexander Lukashenka hold free and fair elections in March.

Members of the Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. (JBANC) joined about seventy people at the daylong gathering organized by the civic initiative Poglyad ("Vision"). Stopping by to address the protestors was Michigan Congressman Thaddeus McCotter. Others participating at the event included Slovak ambassador Rastislav Kacer, We Remember Foundation President Iryna

Krasouskaya, and student journal editor Iryna Vidanava, featured in a December 28 article in The Washington Post.

The "16" symbol has become synonymous with the pro-democracy movement and lighting of candles on that date. In addition, the wearing of jeans has led to labeling of this struggle as the "denim revolution."

Each Washington, DC gathering has drawn increasing interest and attention, witnessed by the presence on February 16 of representatives from the Voice of America, Radio Free-Europe / Radio Liberty, National Public Radio, the London Times, and The Washington Post. Solidarity protests are to be held again on March 16.

In related news, on February 14, House Baltic Caucus co-chair John Shimkus (R-IL) introduced legislation (H.Res. 673) expressing support for democracy in Belarus, and urging the Government of Belarus to conduct a free and fair presidential election on March 19. The resolution has already garnered the backing of congressmen Elton Gallegly, Thaddeus McCotter, Darrell Issa, and Mike Rogers.

JBANC represents the Estonian American National Council, Inc., the American Latvian Association, Inc. and the Lithuanian American Council, Inc.

March 16, 2006, Vilnius, Lithuania

Solidarity and Liberty Concert in Vilnius

The very popular rock band N.R.M led by Lavon Volski, visited Lithuania for the first time. It was part of its extended tour "Revolution Rock" during which the group visited Germany, Poland and Ukraine. They performed as part of the traditional Belarusian-Lithuania Solidarity event, organized by the United Center of Initiatives for Belarus.

The group is known for its soft rock style, and since it never avoids political topics, it has been banned from public performances in Belarus.

United Center of Initiatives for Belarus, www.jubic.org,

March 17, 2006, Brussels, Belgium Visiting the Europarliament

A number of Belarusian activists in Belgium were invited by the office of the Vice Speaker of the Europarliament Janusz Onyszkiewicz. The group consisted of the following diaspora representatives: Ihar Lazarchuk, the coordinator of the Belarusian Union and the BPF representative in Benelux, Kaciaryna Nikiforava and Alhierd Miadzviedzieu, representing BPF and the Young Front, and Siarzhuk Aksimovich, the Director of the Belarusian-European Research Center. They provided information about the upcoming actions of solidarity with the Belarusian people to held on the Election day, March 19 in Brussels, Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Stockholm, London and Paris.



Demonstration at Europarliament

March 19, 2006, Prague, Czech Republic

Belarusian students in the Czech Republic organized a protest rally on Wenceslas Square in the center of the city, calling for free elections in Belarus. The rally was attended members of the Belarusian diaspora in Prague and joined by the Czech parliamentarian Svatopluk Karasek Another rally was held at the Belarusian embassy. Organized by the Union of Belarusians Abroad, it attracted many Czech and Ukrainian sympathizers.



March 19 - Rally in Prague

March 24, 2006, Antwerp, Belgium

A protest was staged in front of the Russian consulate. It was aimed against Russian government's support for the Lukashenka regime. Zmicier Pimienau, the chairman of Belarusian-European Association read the text of a petition: "President Putin has congratulated the usurper Lukashenka with accomplishing an anti-constitutional coup…such action by someone soon to be presiding at the upcoming G8 summit cannot be tolerated."

March 26, 2006, United States

US Citizens Protest Against Disbanding of Peaceful Rallies in Belarus

Protests against brutal breaking up of peaceful demonstrations in Minsk were staged on Saturday, March 25, in Washington, New York and Saint Paul (Minnesota).



March 19 - Demonstrations in U.S.

A picket was held in front of the Belarusian Embassy in Washington . Ukrainians, Poles and Americans participated, in addition to Belarusians.

Over 40 persons stood in front of the Belarusian Embassy with streamers with slogans asking Lukashenka to stop repressions and release political prisoners. They were holding portraits of arrested activists of Belarusian democratic opposition, and streamers demanding free and fair elections.

In Washington participants of the picket were handing out the text of yesterday's address of US President George Bush to the Belarusian people with congratulations on anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. American citizens showed lively interest in the protest; they were expressing their support personally, urged the Belarusians not to give up. Passing cars were honking as a sign of support. Most popular streamers were: "Lukashenka, The Hague is waiting for you!" and "Why only 83%? Saddam had 99.9%"

March 26, 2006, Toronto, Canada

Rally in Support of Democracy in Belarus

Toronto's central square witnessed a populous political meeting in observance of the 88th anniversary of the Belarusian Democratic Republic , and in protest against today's violence and persecution in Belarus.

The meeting was addressed by Ms. Ivonka Survilla, the chairperson of the BNR Rada, Mr. Jason Caney - the secretary of Canada's prime minister, Canadian parliamentarians Borys Wrzesnewskyj and Peggy Nash, writer Volha Ipatava, and others.

Remarks by Borys Wrzesnewskyj, M.P.

During the last few days, thousands of young citizens of the Belarus nation embraced, arms interlocked, in a small corner of October Square in protest of a rigged presidential election and in defiance of the autocratic grip of Europe's last dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko. They did not fear the bloody security apparatus that still retains the dreaded name KGB.



Flags over Toronto

...We call upon Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper to clearly and publicly condemn Mr. Lukashenko as have the E.U. and the U.S., and to institute travel bans on Mr. Lukashenko and the cabal of his inner circle. We further call upon our Prime Minister to publicly condemn Mr. Putin for supporting the Lukashenko dictatorship. Without Mr. Putin's support of Lukashenko, today Belarus' 10 million people would most likely be traveling down the path of democracy and freedom.

Long live an independent and democratic Belarus.

MEDIA WATCH

PRESS REVIEW

The coverage of events in Belarus by the U.S. and British press in the first quarter of 2006 was ***overwhelming****. The MEDIA WATCH section lists 23 articles, including the most interesting excerpts from the editorials.*

Before the Election

Washington's denim revolutionaries *(Times Online -London,* by Elaine Monaghan, Times Online special correspondent, February 20, 2006) — American politicians from President Bush and Condoleezza Rice downwards have lavished more attention than ever before to the state of Belarusian democracy

It is a sobering fact that in Belarus, only 1,000 miles from London, the leader of a regime suspected of making its opponents disappear is almost certainly about to get re-elected.

Bringing Down Europe's Last Ex-Soviet Dictator *(New York Times Magazine,* by Steven Lee Myers, February 26, 2006) — Democratic activists in Belarus expect to lose next month's election. Then they'll get on with their revolution.

Europe's last dictatorship *(«The Guardian»,* March 4, 2006) — In Belarus, an authoritarian, often forgotten corner of Europe, criticising the president can still land you in jail. So it's no surprise that the forthcoming elections are already rumoured to have been fixed. Nick Paton Walsh reports from the land where the Soviet Union never really went away.

A Dictator's Elections *(Washington Post EDITORIAL,* March 6, 2006) — Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko claims to be far ahead in his campaign for reelection this month. And he should be: Mr. Lukashenko, widely known as Europe's last dictator, has deprived his opposition of funding, media, and the opportunity to demonstrate and organize. He has stacked the election commission with his party hacks to ensure that the vote count can be manipulated. He has passed legislation that makes it a crime to "slander" the president, so that his challengers can't criticize him without risking imprisonment.

And yet, with the election in Belarus just two weeks away, Mr. Lukashenko seems to be getting worried. On Thursday he delivered a three-hour rant to a captive party audience, denouncing "dark forces" that he said were plotting against him, as well as Western democracies, which he said were "soaked in blood." Even as he spoke, the president's security forces outside the hall were soaking one of the two opposition candidates in his own blood: Alexander Kozulin, a former academic who heads the Social Democratic Party, was beaten up and then arrested. A local human rights group said 60 other opposition activists had been rounded up.

At a minimum the Belarusan president and his family and all senior members of his government should be targeted by financial sanctions aimed at their Western bank accounts and other assets. **And Mr. Bush should ask for accountability from Mr. Lukashenko's chief economic and political sponsor. That would be Russian President Vladimir Putin, the only leader besides Mr. Lukashenko himself who still supports dictatorship in Europe.**

Mess in Minsk *(The Times,* March 10, 2006) — Belarus is a riddle. How has an Eastern European country the size of England and Wales managed to preserve a Soviet-style dictatorship and a thinly disguised command economy for 17 years while each of its four western neighbours has undergone a revolution or rapid economic transformation — or both?

The answers are not heartening, but neither are they complicated. The first involves the country's eastern neighbour, Russia. Its attitude to its former Soviet "partners" has evolved over the past decade from Boris Yeltsin's reckless abandon to Vladimir Putin's readiness to back a pariah regime in Minsk rather than risk letting Belarus follow Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan out of what the Kremlin persists in calling its sphere of influence.

The second explanation for Belarus's survival in socialist aspic is the success, politically at least, of crude redistributive policies that have bought its leader a measure of grudging loyalty among pensioners and the underemployed. The third explanation is that this leader, Alexander Lukashenko, is a successful thug.

Light the Candles Of Belarus *(The Washington Post,* by Mikulas Dzurinda, prime minister of Slovakia, March 13, 2006)

The denim revolt that can rid Europe of tyranny *(The Financial Times,* by Robin Shepherd, March 16, 2006)

Is dictatorship still possible in 21st-century Europe? By any standards of decency or sanity, the question should be either rhetorical or so hypothetical as not to warrant serious attention. But, as the 10m citizens of the former Soviet republic of Belarus can testify, it is neither. This week`s elections there may determine whether Belarus formally accedes to the title of "last dictatorship in Europe" (bestowed upon it by Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state) or whether the last remnants of tyranny on the Continent are finally swept away.

Waving flags of Denim *(The ECONOMIST,* March 18-24, 2006. Belarus: Special Report)

After the Election

The Struggle for Belarus *(Washington Post EDITORIAL,* March 21, 2006)— PRESIDENT BUSH'S new national security strategy makes the point that "though tyranny has few advocates, it needs more adversaries." The good news about Belarus's farcical presidential election Sunday is that dictator Alexander Lukashenko has acquired a few. To the long-standing enmity of the Bush administration can be added that of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose monitoring mission quickly judged the election as unfair and condemned the "arbitrary use of state power"; the Council of Europe, which called the ballot "a farce"; and the European Union, which said that new sanctions against Mr. Lukashenko and his regime were "very likely."

Most encouraging of all was the appearance in downtown Minsk on Sunday and again last night of thousands of opposition protesters, in spite of snow and a hail of threats by Mr. Lukashenko to break up demonstrations by force. The largest opposition gatherings in his 12 years of rule showed that there is a foundation for a Belarusan freedom movement, like those that eventually triumphed in neighboring Poland and Ukraine.

..... In fact, the G-8 chairman, who has been promoting "energy security" as a topic for discussion during the summit he will proudly host in St. Petersburg, is so pleased with Mr. Lukashenko's government that he is supplying it with gas at one-fifth the price he recently proposed to charge democratic Ukraine. That subsidy, and Russian purchases of the substandard goods of Belarusan state factories, prop up an economy barely changed from the Soviet model. The unambiguous policy of the G-8 chairman is to preserve Russia's domination of its neighbor by backing a dictator who falsifies elections, has murdered leading opponents and enriches himself through arms sales to such countries as Iran and Sudan.

U.S. Calls Belarus Vote for Leader Invalid *(New York Times,* March 21, 2006, by C. J. Chivers and Steven Lee Myers) — MINSK, Belarus, March 20 — The United States declared the results of the president election in Belarus invalid on Monday and called for a new race, even as President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko defiantly swept aside criticism and declared himself the winner of a third term.

Minsk electoral miscarriage *(1995 - 2006 The Heritage Foundation,* www.heritage.org, March 21, 2006*)*
First appeared in the *Washington Times.*

On March 19, Belarus, the last dictatorship in Europe, held presidential elections. President Alexander Lukashenko claimed more than 80 percent of the vote after threatening to "wring necks to those who threaten a coup."

Belarus Leader Defiant After Reelection as U.S., E.U. Threaten Sanctions *Washington Post Foreign Service,* by Peter Finn, March 21, 2006)

Arrests Hold Down Protests on Belarus Vote *(NEW YORK TIMES,* by Steven Lee Myers and C. J. Chivers, March 21, 2006)

The Belarus 'election' *(Washington Times, EDITORIAL,* March 22, 2006) —Election monitors did not need to wait for the official vote tally to know that the elections in Belarus lacked, in the words of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, "constitutionally guaranteed rights of freedom of expression, association, and assembly." President Alexander Lukashenko had muted the independent media and curtailed unsanctioned political rallies, and reports of physical harassment were prominent in the campaign landscape. In addition, Belarussian election officials refused to accurately count the votes. So the monitors from OSCE formally declared the election undemocratic.

After the voting Sunday night, and again on Monday, supporters of the opposition rallied in Minsk, calling for another vote. This display and similar calls from the international community have gone unheeded (and even jeered) by Mr. Lukashenko.

... The United States and the EU should also establish objective news outlets modeled on the successful Cold-War-era Radio Free Europe and Voice of America in order to challenge the one-sided coverage of the state-controlled media and undermine Mr. Lukashenko's authoritarian stifling of the media. The White House seems to be on the right track with regard to sanctions, which would include, according to spokesman Scott McClellan, "travel restrictions and targeted financial sanctions of individuals."

Democracy can take hold in Belarus, much as it did in Georgia and Ukraine. Increased visa restrictions for regime officials, freezing personal assets, pressure on Russia to stop its de facto subsidy of the regime and the introduction of a free press will all point toward the dread of Mr. Lukashenko and his supporters — liberty and democracy.

Belarus Protesters Urged to Persevere *(Washington Post Foreign Service,* by Peter Finn, March 22, 2006)

MINSK, Belarus, March 21 -- Belarusan opposition leader Alexander Milinkevich called Tuesday for demonstrators camped on a darkened and cold central square here to keep up their protest until March 25, a date revered by the opposition as the anniversary of the founding in 1918 of a brief-lived independent republic.

"We will come here every day until March 25 to speak about freedom," said Milinkevich, speaking on October Square, where the authorities have turned off lights that normally illuminate it. "The authorities want to destroy this small city of freedom. We will not let them do it."

A Dictator's 'Re-election'(*Editorial, New York Times,* March 22, 2006) — As anybody who observed politics in the old Soviet Union knows, sending voters to the polls does not guarantee a real election. Democracy is about choice, not marching off to reaffirm the status quo. That's why Sunday brought the dismal news that Aleksandr Lukashenko, often called Europe's last dictator, had declared himself "re-elected" as president of Belarus with almost 83 percent of the vote.

On Scene: A Revolution in Belarus ? *(TIME,* by YURI ZARAKHOVICH, March 22, 2006) — At first glance, some twenty multi-colored tents that popped up in Minsk`s downtown Oktyabrskaya Square on Monday night looked the next bright morning like merry little stalls offering hot tea and cakes to those enjoying the square`s small outdoor skating rink. But the tents were covered with the national white and red colors of Belarus, frowned upon since President Alexander Lukashenko officially reintroduced the Soviet-era symbols back in 1995, and the 1000 or so people standing vigil around the tents didn`t look like they were enjoying a day out with the family. Having spent a freezing night in the square, exhausted by sporadic scuffles with the police, or fighting back bulldozers threatening to erase their makeshift abodes, they could have used some hot food — if only the police who cordoned off the square would not harass those trying to bring it in.

Before the now much-disputed election that brought these hardy souls to stand vigil, people in Minsk were making bets on how resounding a victory Europe`s "last dictator," as Lukashenko is widely known, would claim in his third presidential race. Pessimists expected him to win hands down with some 78%, while realists expected Russian President Vladimir Putin to instruct his vassal to restrain his usual bad manners and go with a more reasonable 56% to 60%.

Both schools, however, agreed that Lukashenko was growing more tense and unsure of himself than ever — and, as a result, was even more unpredictable and dangerous than ever.

...And both camps, as it turned out, proved wrong on the returns: in the end, Lukashenko claimed almost 83%.

The indignation with that phenomenon grew so high that some 35,000 people — according to internal police projections — gathered in the square Sunday night. Considering that opposition rallies over the last several years had been unable to attract more than 4,000 to 5,000, it was an astounding figure for the usually reserved and detached Belorusians. Many fewer showed up on Monday night, leaving only some 1,000 standing vigil Tuesday morning. But by the evening, as five EU ambassadors came to rub shoulders with opposition candidates Alexander Milinkevich and Alexander Kozulin, more people slipped through the police lines, bringing the number of protesters back up to around 7,000. Most importantly, they vowed to heed Milinkevich`s call to stay through Saturday — which happens to be Liberty Day, the anniversary of the Belarus People`s Republic, an independent state, proclaimed in March 1918 and crushed by the Bolsheviks — when the opposition now plans another mass protest rally. "This regime understands only the language of the street," summed up Milinkevich, a mild-mannered scientist-turned politician, who has demanded new elections.

In 50-Yard Square in Belarus, a Country Within *(New York Times, by C. J. Chivers, March 23, 2006)*

MINSK, Belarus, March 22 — By midnight, as the temperature dropped ever lower and morning twilight was still five hours off, the core of Belarus's public opposition assumed its shape in the darkness.

It was about 300 people, arms interlocked and forming a small, dense square, stomping on the frozen ground under a police cadre's contemptuous gaze. Behind them, inside their human box, another group of demonstrators held their banned flags overhead, a thicket of banners over 20 small tents. At any moment, the demonstrators said, they expected the police to rush forward, beat them with clubs and drag them off to the detention cells. And then their protest would end in blood.

All of them said they were ready. "They may attack and beat us and inflict great trauma," said Stepan Svidersky, 18, a student. "But we have already achieved a result: We have shown our country that we are not afraid to stand against arbitrary rule."

Shun Belarus' illegitimate regime *(Posted on Philadelphia Enquirer Web site,* by Ethan S. Burger, March 23, 2006) — Several months after Ukraine's "Orange Revolution," Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko declared there "will be no rose, orange or banana revolutions" in his country.

In recent years, he has clamped down on civil society, sought to destroy the political opposition, and banned the sale of newspapers published by the independent press. If force was needed to hold on to power, he could rely on the police, a paramilitary force of at least 110,000 troops, and elements of the KGB.

The country's Central Election Commission reported that Lukashenko received 82.6 percent of the votes cast in Sunday's election. His nearest competitor, Alexander Milinkevich, won 6 percent. The government made it impossible to conduct reliable exit polling and, unlike in Ukraine, there is no independent supreme court to declare the election invalid, despite substantial evidence of fraud.

But the election has not gone unnoticed. The United States has declared the results invalid, and thousands of Belarusians have protested peacefully in Minsk's October Square since the results were announced.

... The ability of an illegitimate government to continue in power undermines international law. Allowing a government to defy the law without consequences is analogous to enacting criminal laws and holding trials but never punishing the guilty.

Of course, some nations would oppose cracking down on illegitimate regimes, either because of their relationship with Lukashenko's government or out of concern that they might be similarly treated in the future. But this week's election provides

an excellent test case where legitimate governments can stand against oppression - and with the citizens of Belarus.

Belarus Protest Dispersed as Police Arrest Hundreds (*New York Times,* by C. J. Chivers, March 24, 2006)

MINSK, Belarus, Friday, March 24 — Belarusian riot police officers arrested hundreds of antigovernment demonstrators early Friday morning in the central square of Minsk, ending five days of protests with a swift police action.

The police arrived on six large trucks just after 3 a.m., wearing black riot helmets and masks, and surrounded the small encampment in October Square.

The following statement was issued on 30 March by seven independent human rights experts of the United Nations:

We express our serious concern over the deterioration of the human rights situation before, during and after the recent presidential election in Belarus. Specifically, we are alarmed at the large number of violations of the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, fair trial, physical and mental integrity and to liberty.

Despite numerous appeals made by United Nations Special Rapporteurs to cease human rights violations immediately, in particular to stop politically motivated arrests and detentions of independent journalists, opposition candidates, their supporters, and human rights defenders, we note with regret that once again peaceful public demonstrations held on Friday 24 and Saturday 25 March, were violently repressed by the Belarusian police. On Saturday, the police used teargas and mock grenades to disperse the crowd. The police violently clubbed and arrested numerous demonstrators.

We have received reports that, to date, at least 1000 protesters, including numerous Belarusian and foreign journalists, are being held in detention in Minsk and the Minsk district. In most cases, family members are unaware of their whereabouts. Over 150 people were reportedly already summarily tried without access to a defense lawyer and more people are expected to have similar trials in the coming days. Concerns are expressed regarding respect for their right to a fair trial.

We call on the Government of Belarus to immediately provide us with the names of the persons detained in connection with the above events, their location, as well as the charges they face. The Special Rapporteurs also call for an independent, prompt and transparent investigation into all allegations of serious human rights violations.

The Independent Experts are:

- Adrian Severin, Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Belarus
- Ambeyi Ligabo, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
- Manfred Nowak, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Hina Jilani, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Human Rights Defenders,
- Leila Zerrougui, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
- Stephen J. Toope, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
- Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

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